RAMPARTS

NOVEMBER·1962

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RAMPARTS

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SEVEN GOTHIC TALES
OUT OF AFRICA
WINTER'S TALES
THE ANGELIC AVENGERS
LAST TALES
ANECDOTES OF DESTINY
SHADOWS ON THE GRASS

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"No more with overflowing light
Shall fill the eyes that now are faded,
Nor shall another's fringe with night
Their woman-hidden world as they did.
No more shall quiver down the days
The flowing wonder of her ways,
Whereof no language may requite
The shifting and the many-shaded."

ISAK DINESEN
1885-1962

"Who then . . . tells a finer tale than any of us? Silence does. And where does one read a deeper tale than upon the most perfectly printed page of the most precious book? Upon the blank page. When a royal and gallant pen, in the moment of its highest inspiration, has written down its tale with the rarest ink of all—where, then, may one read a still deeper, sweeter, merrier and more cruel tale than that? Upon the blank page."

ISAK DINESEN, *Last Tales*

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"my father moved through dooms of love
through sames of am through haves of give,
singing each morning out of each night
my father moved through depths of height . . .
—i say though hate were why men breathe—
because my father lived his soul
love is the whole and more than all"

"nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals
the power of your intense fragility: whose texture
compels me with the colour of its countries,
rendering death and forever with each breathing
(i do not know what it is about you that closes
and opens; only something in me understands
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands"

e. e. cummings

1894 - 1962

"anyone lived in a pretty how town
(with up so floating many bells down)
spring summer autumn winter
he sang his didn't he danced his did"

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WILLIAM FAULKNER
1897 - 1962

"Numberless are the world's wonders, but none
More wonderful than man; the storm-grey sea
Yields to his prows, the huge crests bear him high;
Earth, holy and inexhaustible, is graven
With shining furrows where his plows have gone
Year after year, the timeless labor of stallions . . .
Words also, and thought as rapid as air,
He fashions to his good use; statecraft is his,
And his the skill that deflects the arrows of snow,
The spears of winter rain: from every wind
He has made himself secure—from all but one:
In the late wind of death he cannot stand."

SOLDIER'S PAY
SARTORIS
THE SOUND AND THE FURY
AS I LAY DYING
SANCTUARY
LIGHT IN AUGUST
ABSALOM, ABSALOM!
THE WILD PALMS
THE UNVANQUISHED
THE HAMLET
THE BEAR
INTRUDER IN THE DUST
A FABLE

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Philosophy &

THE TITLE OF THIS COLLECTION OF ESSAYS ON the contemporary French novel* raises once again the very difficult problem of the relation between a novelist's philosophy and his art. It is a matter of historical fact that in times of settled beliefs men have tended to write well; that when traditional beliefs have been challenged and the stability of society threatened, they have gone out of their way to discover an alternative system of belief or a philosophy which would provide them with a framework, give unity and shape to their artistic experience. One of the most celebrated examples is Zola who swallowed philosophical determinism hook, line and sinker. While it is arguable that his theories of heredity gave him the staying power necessary to carry out his vast undertaking, it is clear today that he succeeded in spite and not because of the very inhibiting philosophy that he adopted. What is impressive about the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle is not the philosophy, but the *vision* of the Empire drifting slowly and relentlessly to disaster and finally collapsing in smoke and ashes.

Since Zola's time the position has steadily deteriorated. The writer is no longer able to put the whole of his creative powers into his work; he is obliged to expend his energies in trying to produce the conditions in which literature becomes possible. One of the main differences between writers studied here and their predecessors is that instead of adopting a ready-made system like Zola, they have either incorporated their own systems into their novels, or they have used the novel as an instrument for the philosophical investigation of experience. Dr. Cruickshank puts it cogently when he speaks, in his introductory essay, of their treating the writing of fiction as a "cognitive activity."

IN A STUDY OF SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR, Mr. Maurice Cranston throws some further light on the situation by an amusing comparison between the English and French attitudes to philosophy. In France philosophy is not a parlour game as it is in England; it is a serious—an almost tragically serious—business. Although David Hume was at least as much of an unbeliever as the French existentialists, he lost no sleep because reason failed to prove the existence of God and the Moral Law. He did not repose his head on the pillow of doubt, observes Mr. Cranston; he reposed it on the pillow of habit and custom and tradition. This, we are told, is where Hume and the British generally have the advantage over French philosophers:

> In a country where there is security, where the law is effectively enforced, and where convention upholds a decent moral order, it does not matter if the abstract truths of classical philosophy are found to be empty. But in a country where there is no political stability, where the Germans repeatedly invade one, and the franc does not hold, there is no refuge in habit, custom and tradition. If in such a situation the universe is found to have no rational order, the discovery will understandably be felt as a disaster."

*_The Novelist as Philosopher_. Studies in French Fiction 1935-60. Edited by John Cruickshank. Oxford University Press.

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Martin Turnell

the Novel

It is evident that in the decidedly emotional climate of invasion, 'disaster' and falling money values described here logical positivism has nothing to offer the man or the writer, but that a *lebensphilosophie* like existentialism may bring succour to both. This is how Dr. Weightman summarizes Sartre's philosophy:

"All Sartre's fiction deals with the themes of his philosophy. It shows the human consciousness caught in an alien, ultimately incomprehensible world, of which the first manifestation is the body in which that consciousness finds itself. There is no God and, therefore, no universal, objective system of values. Nor can there be any given "system" of secular morality, such as humanist thinkers are fond of imagining. Each individual is faced with freedom of choice and is aware of his freedom and his contingency as anguish . . . "

Dr. Weightman goes on to show why this philosophy fits into the framework of the novel.

"Sartre," he writes, "is not the kind of philosopher whose work is diametrically opposed to novel-writing. He does not aim at devising a system of abstractions tangential to, or remote from, ordinary living. He does not meditate timelessly on Truth and Beauty, nor does he go in for circumscribed linguistic analysis. As a phenomenologist, his concern is to grasp situations in their concrete completeness. . . . When a philosophy tries to adhere in this way to the whole surface of existence, it is clearly not far removed from the literary approach. Indeed, we may ask whether the philosophers of the post-Kierkegaardian tradition should not be more properly termed philosophical literary men."

The argument of this book is that, owing to the breakdown of traditional values, sweeping changes have taken place in the French novel during the past twenty-five years. They affect both the novelists' subject-matter and their method. "The tradition of literary character analysis," says Dr. Cruickshank, "has been widely discredited . . . material objects seem to have occupied the scene more and more as the portrayal of character has become increasingly abstract and non-psychological." In short, people are "out" and metaphysics is "in."

THIS VIEW SEEMS TO ME to call for one important reservation. It is suggested by Dr. Weightman's reference to Kierkegaard. The French situation is not so novel, the break with tradition not so recent, as these writers are inclined to suggest.

While there has undoubtedly been a widespread breakdown in traditional values, it did not occur suddenly in our own century. It was a much more gradual process and its origins must be sought in the eighteenth century. The determinism of the French *philosophes* of the Enlightenment undermined belief in the supernatural; the philosophical idealism which derives from Berkeley and Kant weakened man's conviction of the reality of the external world, while the two together ended by making him doubt the reality of his own existence. The French Revolution provided the driving power for the upheavals which followed.

These were the forces which went to the shaping of nineteenth-century literature. The century is divided by the conflict between scientific determinism and idealism. It is reflected in the literary order by the conflict between realism and roman-

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ticism. At the root of all modern philosophies there is a marked subjective element. We cannot say with certainty whether determinism asserted the existence of the external world with such vehemence in order to allay the doubts sown by idealism, or whether idealism was prompted by a desire to escape from a purely mechanical universe, but something of the kind undoubtedly happened in literature. The minute inventory of material things in the work of the realists and naturalists was part of an attempt to find something solid and enduring in a world of dissolving values, while the withdrawal of the writers who stemmed from the Romantic Movement into an inner world was equally an attempt to find a place for aspirations which were excluded from the world of naturalism. Nor must we forget that the Romantic Movement itself was in part the product of religious decline and provided a release for insights which were previously associated with institutional religion.

ALL TRUE IMAGINATIVE LITERATURE offers us an interpretation of reality. It is the result of what may be described as "insight" or "vision." The traditional novelist operates in a stable, or apparently stable, world; but he uses his insight, which may be religious or moral or psychological, or a blend of all three, to rearrange the raw materials of experience. "What distinguishes the modern from the classical sensibility," said Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, "is that the latter is nourished by moral and the former by metaphysical problems." This observation occurs in an essay on Dostoevsky and points to the moment when the major change took place. In Jane Austen and George Eliot insight is primarily moral; in Henry James's anatomy of the corruption of polite society at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries it is both moral and psychological. There are profound religious, moral and psychological insights in Dostoevsky, but what gives him his enormous stature among novelists is his systematic investigation into the nature and structure of reality. In the last chapter of his book on him, Berdyaev calls him "the greatest Russian metaphysician." His influence has been immense. It is impossible to believe that without him Kafka, who himself has been one of the two most influential European novelists of the twentieth century, would have achieved all he did in the way he did, but the Dostoevsky breakthrough was not entirely the isolated phenomenon for which it is sometimes taken. Although Rimbaud was born more than thirty years later than Dostoevsky, his poetry was written in the same decades as some of Dostoevsky's major works. He proclaimed that the aim of poetry was not to "entertain" or "instruct," but to "change" life, to reach what he called "la vraie vie": the ultimate reality which was hidden behind the transitory world of appearances. The existentialists have paid tributes to Dostoevsky and Rimbaud. They have been less indulgent to Proust whose reputation has suffered from the discredit into which psychological analysis has fallen; but Proust echoed Rimbaud's phrase about "la vraie vie" in the great work which he described as "the story of an invisible vocation."

I do not want to exaggerate the similarities between Dostoevsky or Kafka and the French existentialists, but it is clear that in Dostoevsky metaphysics and prose fiction converged, that Dostoevsky and Kafka were the forerunners of the existentialists, and that there are undoubtedly similarities of theme, approach and method.

AMONG THE COMMONEST EXISTENTIALIST concepts are "alienation," the "absurd" and "anguish." The protagonists of Dostoevsky and Kafka, of Sartre and Camus, are often "alienated" creatures or "outsiders"—think of the unhappy protagonist of *The Castle* designated only by the initial K—who are wrestling with ultimate problems and racked by "anguish." One of the most obvious characteristics of any metaphysical discourse is *dialectic*. It is something that we find in all the novelists I have named. Dostoevsky's characters are endlessly preoccupied with the problem of the existence and nature of God. Kafka has been called the author of "metaphysical tales" rather than a metaphysical or existentialist novelist, but there is a highly personal dialectic—a dialectic of images rather than language—in K's continued comings and goings as he attempts to establish contact with "the castle"; the dialectic of

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Grace withheld in a new kind of Jansenist world. The French existentialists usually start from a position of absolute unbelief and the dialectic rotates round the problems of the "alienated" consciousness and freedom of "choice," but in an inverted way the "anguish" is nevertheless generated by the problem of the existence of God.

The dialectical movement produces a certain similarity of form: the great monologues of Dostoevsky's characters, particularly those of Ivan Karamazov and the protagonist of *Memoirs from a Dark Cellar* (American title, *Notes From Underground*) who is pleading before an unseen audience whom he addresses as "gentlemen"; the "philosophical diary" of Antoine Roquentin in Sartre's *La Nausée*; the monologue-confession of the judge-penitent in Camus's *The Fall* arguing his case to an anonymous acquaintance whose replies are suppressed, or the monologue addressed to us, the readers, in Cayrol's novel with its striking title: *On vous parle* ("Somebody is Speaking to You").

WHEN WE TURN TO THE CONCEPT of the "absurd," we find that though the "absurd" of Dostoevsky is very far from being identical with that of Kafka or the French existentialists who in any case differ from one another, there are nevertheless very marked affinities. The concept of the "absurd" is fundamental in all the writers I have mentioned and it is clear from *The Myth of Sisyphus* that, in spite of the differences we find in Sartre, Camus, Queneau and Beckett, it stems from Dostoevsky. When Dostoevsky's characters settle for a godless universe, life suddenly appears meaningless and absurd to them; it generates "anguish" which in the case of Kirilov leads to a particularly horrifying suicide. In Kafka the ordinary course of life is interrupted when one man is appointed to the post of surveyor but is unable to make any contact with his employers; when another is arrested, tried and executed for an unspecified crime; or again when the laws governing ordinary life are suspended and another character is suddenly changed into an insect. Life is turned upside down; irrational forces are unleashed, creating the twofold sensation of "absurdity" and "anguish."

We can perhaps say that one of the principal differences between Dostoevsky or Kafka and the existentialists is that while in Dostoevsky and Kafka the "absurd" is created by something that happens in the novels, in the existentialists it is the starting point. An initial intuition that "there is no God and, therefore, no universal, objective system of values" reduces life to meaninglessness and creates the tragically "absurd" situation in which "consciousnessness" finds itself. We can go on to observe that there is an intimate connection between the "absurd" and the dialectical movement which gives the novels their power and intensity. In many of their works, particularly in *The Trial*, *The Outsider* (American title, *The Stranger*) and *The Fall* not merely the individual characters, but Man himself is "on trial," trying to justify to himself or others a real or imaginary infringement of arbitrary, inexplicable or possibly non-existent laws, while in *The Castle* and *Waiting for Godot* he seems to be trying to make contact with the law-giver, to find a meaning, even where he does not believe that there is one, which will transcend and resolve the "absurdity" of life. In either case, dialectic is the means that he uses in the attempt—the vain attempt—to extricate himself from the "absurd" situation.

In a treatise which she called, somewhat grandiloquently, *Existentialism and the Wisdom of Nations*, Simone de Beauvoir remarked that the contemporary novelist discovers "truths whose appearance he did not recognize beforehand, questions to which he has no solution. . . . He must ask new questions, run risks; and thus, when he has completed his novel, he will view it with astonishment and will be unable to translate it into abstract terms because it will have taken on its own meaning and form in a single operation."

THE PROBLEM THAT WE HAVE TO SOLVE, the problem that Dr. Cruickshank and his team are all trying to solve, is the precise nature of the insight which distinguishes the French existentialist novelists and the sense in which they can rightly be described as novelist-philosophers, or their books metaphysical novels. The best way of tackling it is to examine one of the central passages—it must inevitably be a long passage—

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from *La Nausée* which is not merely one of the most successful works produced by the group, but is really the type of contemporary existentialist novel.

The novel opens with these words:

"The best thing would be to write down events from day to day. To keep a diary in order to understand them."

This recalls Simone de Beauvoir's observations on the aim of the contemporary novelist, and suggests the way in which the actual writing of the novel becomes a method of philosophical investigation.

It will be remembered that Antoine Roquentin is living in the town of Bouville-sur-Mer working at the municipal library on a biography of an eighteenth-century Marquis de Rollebon. Sartre for his picture of Bouville-sur-Mer drew on his own stay at Le Havre where he was professor of philosophy. The invented name contains allusions to the French words *boue*, "mud," and *bovin*, which can mean either "bovine" or "cowherd." The inference is that one of the novelist's aims is to attack a typical French, middle-class, commercial city. It is "Mudtown-on-Sea"; a town of "bovine types," animals. The brilliant account of the Sunday parade of the locals provides an opportunity for an onslaught on the commercial middle-class; they are like the local "worthies," whose portraits he inspects in the art gallery, examples of the existentialists' "bad faith." Now Roquentin is continually overcome by a sensation of "nausea." The feeling is always identical, but it seems to be provoked by a variety of different circumstances such as the sight of boys making stone ricochet on the sea, a glass of beer, or the purple braces of the *patron* of a cheap restaurant. He is trying to explain its nature and meaning to himself. The meaning suddenly becomes clear to him when he is sitting one day in the public gardens:

"I cannot say that I feel better or satisfied; on the contrary, I am overwhelmed by it. The only thing is that I have reached my goal: I know what I wanted to know; I understand everything that has happened to me since January. The feeling of Nausea has not left me and I do not think that it will do so in the immediate future; but I am no longer subjected to it; it is not an illness or some passing indisposition: it is I.

"A few minutes ago, then, I was in the public gardens. The root of a chestnut tree was thrusting into the ground just below the bench on which I was sitting. I no longer remembered that it was a root. The words had evaporated and with them the meaning of things and the way of using them, the feeble signposts that men have traced on their surface. I was sitting, a little hunched up, with my head lowered, alone in front of the black, knotty, brute mass which frightened me. And then I had the illumination.

"It took my breath away. Never, until these last few days, had I had any inkling of what was meant by "existing." I was like other people, like people walking along the edge of the sea in their spring clothes. Like them I said: "the sea is green; the white speck up there *is* a seagull," but I did not feel that it existed, that the gull was an "existant-gull"; in the normal way existence is hidden. It is there, around us, in us, it is we; we cannot say a word without speaking of it, and ultimately, we do not touch it. When I believed that I was thinking about it, it must be assumed that I was thinking of nothing, that my head was empty, or that at most there was a word in my head, the word "be" . . . And then, all at once, it was there, clear as daylight: existence had suddenly been unveiled. It has lost the harmless appearance of an abstract category: it was the very stuff of things, and that root was embedded in existence. Or rather the root, the railings in the gardens, the scanty grass of the lawn, had all disappeared; the diversity of things, their individuality, were nothing but appearance, a varnish. The varnish had dissolved; there remained soft, monstrous masses in disorder—naked with a frightening, obscene nakedness . . . I realized that there was no half-way house between non-existence and this swooning abundance. If we existed, we must exist *up to this point:* to the point of mouldering, of bulging, of obscenity. In another world, circles and melodies retain their pure, rigid contours. But existence is degeneration. . . .

"The word Absurdity falls from my pen now; a few minutes ago, in the gardens, it did not come to mind, but I was not looking for it either; I did not need it: I was thinking *about* things *with* things. Absurdity was not an idea in my head or the whisper of voices, but the long dead snake at my feet, a wooden snake. Whether it was a snake or claw or root or vulture's talon matters little. And without formulating anything precisely, I realized that I had found the key to Existence, the key to my attacks of Nausea, to my own life. In fact, everything that I have since been able to grasp can be reduced to this fundamental absurdity. Absurdity: another word; I wrestle with words; down there I touched the thing itself. A movement, an event, in the little coloured world of men is never anything more than relatively absurd: in relation to the circumstances which accompany it. The babble of a madman, for

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example, is absurd in relation to the situation in which he happens to find himself, but not in relation to his madness. But a few minutes ago, I experienced the absolute: the absolute or the absurd. There was nothing in relation to which the root was absurd. Oh, how can I find the words to express it? Absurd: in relation to the pebbles, the tufts of yellow grass, the dried mud, the tree, the sky, the white benches. Absurd, irreducible; nothing—not even the profound and secret frenzy of nature—could explain it.

"It was an extraordinary moment. I was there, motionless, paralysed, plunged in a horrible ecstasy. But in the very depths of this ecstasy something new had made its appearance: I understood Nausea; I possessed it. To tell the truth, I did not express my discoveries in words. But I think that at the present moment it would be easy to put them into words. The essential thing is contingency. I mean that by definition existence is not necessity. To exist simply means *to be there;* existants appear, can be *met*, but we can never *deduce* them. I think that there are people who have understood that. The only thing is that they have tried to overcome this contingecy by inventing a necessary being who is self-caused. Now no necessary being can explain existence: contingency is not a false appearance, an appearance which can be removed; it is the absolute, and as a result perfect gratuitousness. Everything is gratuitous—the gardens, the town, and I myself.

"Existence is not something which can be thought about at a distance: it has to invade you suddenly, come to a halt on top of you, weigh heavily on your heart like a large, motionless beast—otherwise there is no longer anything at all."

Antoine Roquentin's account of his experience of "existence" conveys better than anything else in the book the peculiar quality of Sartre's fiction. The most important single word in the passages that I have quoted is the word "illumination." Whatever we may think of the findings, it is clear that what is at work here is metaphysical insight of the kind that we observe alike in Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard. It is not philosophising or argument: it is a direct perception of "existence" as a soft, gluey, amorphous, obscenely naked mass, a "swooning abundance" invading and overwhelming the protagonist, obliterating the individuality of the objects of common experience. There is no necessary being; the "absurd" is the absolute; everything is contingent.

THE MOST STRIKING THING about the illumination is that it is a vision of complete negation. The weakness of this personal philosophy is not merely that it is far more inhibiting than Zola's crude determinism. It is that compared with the power of the metaphysical disaster, which is the core of the novel, the postives are distressing in their poverty and their puerility: the gramophone record of the jazz song, "Some of these days / You'll miss me honey," which is "young and firm like a pitiless witness" and whose authors, a Jew and a negress, because they are presumed to be dead, are "saved, washed clean of the sin of existence"; or Roquentin's decision to write a novel which will shed a "faint radiance" over his past life.

I think we must add that though the *mode* of Sartre's experience is similar to Dostoevsky's the actual experience is as far removed as it could be from the creative experience of a Dostoevsky. It does not open up fresh perspectives; it is of its nature destructive and can only lead to a dead end. *La Nausée* is not what is ordinarily meant by an "autobiographical novel," but it is clear that there is a good deal of Sartre the Philosopher in the protagonist. Now the central experience cannot be repeated or extended any more than a philosopher can go on writing "systems." This explains the failure of most of Sartre's other fiction. *Huis clos* is a brilliant tour de force and the *Chemins de la liberté* contains occasional insights, but in the main the later novel gives the impression of dispersal and dilution. It is an attempt to extract themes and ideas from his philosophy and put them into a novel.

WHAT I HAVE SAID about the mode of Sartre's experience in *La Nausée* brings out one of the main differences between him and other members of the group. What is impressive about his achievement in *La Nausée* is the fusion of metaphysical and artistic vision. In the novels of Simone de Beauvoir there is no necessary connection between the philosophy and the novels. She uses the novel-form to propagate ideas which are not an organic experience as a novelist. Camus differs from both Sartre and Mme. de Beauvoir. It has been said of him that he is a moralist rather than a philosopher, a "philosophically-minded" novelist rather than a novelist-philosopher. In his best work we find moral and philosophical in-

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sights illuminating experience, but nothing in the nature of Sartre's vision of existence. The moral-philosophical approach has its own dangers. If *The Outsider* and *The Fall* are two of the most accomplished short novels written in our time, *The Plague* seems to me to be the most over-praised work of fiction which has appeared since the war precisely because it is really a moral tract masquerading as a novel.

The preoccupation with negation, the absence of genuinely creative approaches and the tendency, in their later work to substitute moralising for perception on the part of a number of the writers studied in Dr. Cruickshank's volume, gives a particular interest to Mr. Carlos Lynes's essay on a novelist who is still comparatively unknown outside his own country. Although Jean Cayrol has denied that there is any such person as "the Catholic writer" and has asserted that there are only Catholics who write, he is for most of us a Catholic novelist with a difference. In a number of ways his world resembles that of Sartre and Camus. Like them he is concerned with the theme of "alienation" in a "world in ruins." He is as hostile as they are to the staleness and deadness of this world where things have lost their meaning, and the protagonist of his first novel, *On vous parle*, is not without affinities with Camus's Meursault in *The Outsider*, but his ultimate vision is as different from theirs as it could well be. The central image in his early work—the poetry as well as the fiction—is the raising of Lazarus. For in his work man starts as a "dead" man, as an outsider, an alienated consciousness in a world of concentration camps, but he is not satisfied with anything like Roquentin's ambition to write a novel which will shed a "faint radiance," as he waits "with rounded shoulders" for the train that will carry him from Bouville to Paris. In place of the "absurd," the "anguish" leading to "rebellion," his essential themes are "reconciliation," "renewal" and "hope." The novels end with the word "tomorrow" and the faint gleam of dawn breaking, but in none of them are there conversions or violent changes of direction in the lives of the characters. The endings are deliberately pitched in a soft key of hints and hopes and gleams, but these gleams are the forerunners of something more real and more substantial than Roquentin's "peu de clarté."

In his introduction Dr. Cruickshank states firmly that the ten novelists discussed in the book do not form a "distinctive school or movement," that there are considerable differences of artistic achievement and temperament between them. All he claims for them is a "family likeness" which he thinks could not easily be extended to Gide and Mauriac, but might include Montherlant and Julien Green. The procession is headed by Bernanos and Malraux. They are the "precursors" who describe "the fermentation of a Christianity in decay" and "the hopeless estrangement of man in a post-Christian world." Their "successors," in addition to Sartre, Camus, Simone de Beauvoir and Cayrol, are Queneau, Beckett, Blanchot and Robbe-Grillet. For reasons that I have already given, it seems to me that the "family likeness" would have to be extended to cover novelists belonging to other generations and other countries. It is easy enough to recognize the "family likeness" in Sartre, Camus and Mme. de Beauvoir, or again in Queneau and Beckett, but there are moments when it grows a little faint. One has the impression that the common factor is the situation in which the novelists find themselves—the sensation of being at grips with "the human condition"—rather than a similarity of approach. This, at any rate, seems the only possible connection between two novelists as different as Malraux and Robbe-Grillet, or Bernanos and Cayrol who in other respects are almost as far removed from one another as it is possible for two writers to be who share the same faith.

Martin Turnell, *one of the ranking authorities on French literature, has published four major works of literary criticism* (The Classical Moment; Baudelaire; The Novel in France; The Art of Fiction in France), *a monograph on* Jacques Riviere, *and the recent* Modern Literature and Christian Faith. *He lives in London.*

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GALERIE RELIGIEUSE
by Djuna Barnes

The blood of the Lamb and the oriflamme
Wax and wane in the raked heart's core.
Hell flowers lightly; an angel slain
And cropped of earth, twines with the twain.
Above the arc of the icy laces,
In long sheaved wings, the heavenly choir,
With lambent, fourfold, impending faces
Shout upward through the motes of prayer,
Shaking the ranks of stately lilies,
In *Saint Denis,* where His Love is spent,
Dwindling on the mouth of Time,
Spiked on the votive thorn of Lent.

DJUNA BARNES *has been acclaimed by T. S. Eliot, Dylan Thomas, Edwin Muir, and Wallace Fowlie as one of the greatest stylists of the Twentieth Century. A painter, poet, fictionist, and dramatist, Miss Barnes was one of the most legendary Expatriate figures of the 1920's. A woman of arresting and "Junoesque" beauty, she was one of the original Provincetown Players and acted in the early O'Neill plays. Her masterpiece, the novel* Nightwood *(1937), is one of the seminal works of the Twentieth Century: its influence can be seen upon Carson McCullers, Truman Capote, Malcolm Lowry and many younger writers. A recent collection,* The Selected Works of Djuna Barnes *(Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1962), contains her short stories* (Spillway), *her chief novel* (Nightwood), *and a verse drama* (The Antiphon). *She lives in New York.*

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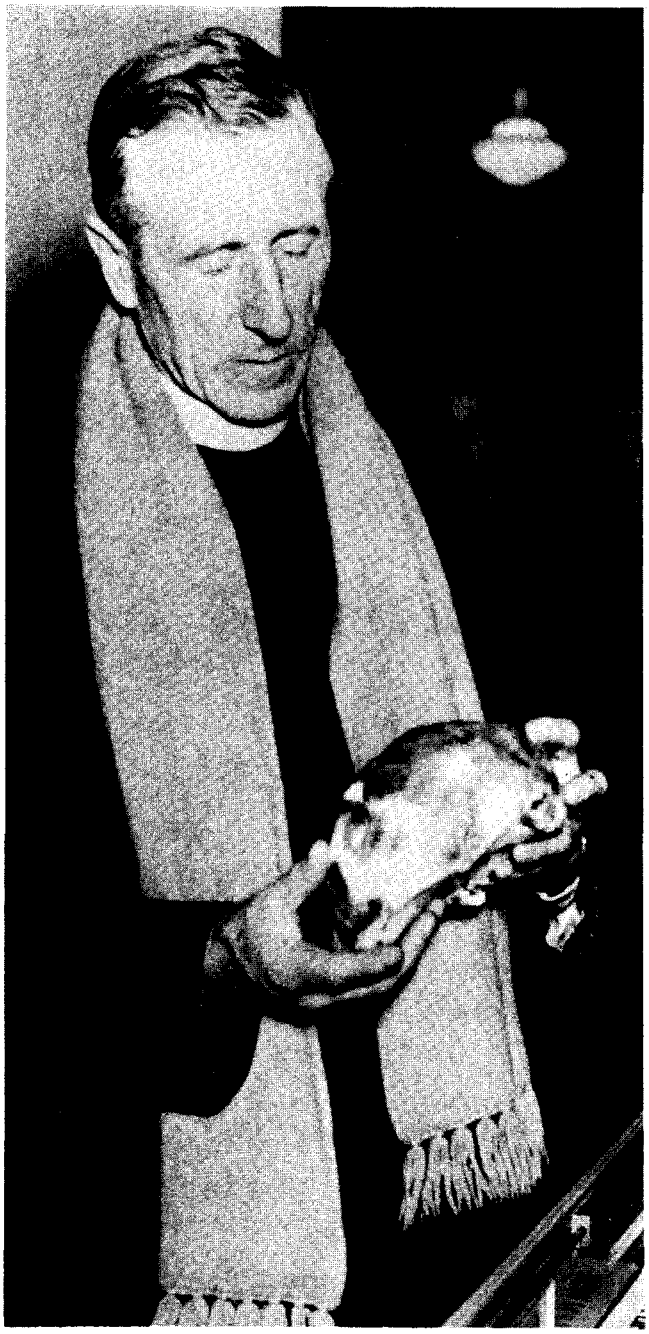

CHRIST IN MATTER

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, *the celebrated French Jesuit and paleontologist, was born in 1881 and died in 1955. He developed a controversial theory of evolution, reconciling science and religion, and propounded his ideas in a number of books, all of which were published posthumously. Three of his books have been translated into English:* The Phenomenon of Man *(1959),* The Divine Milieu *(1960), and* Letters From A Traveller *(1962).*

Translated by Noël Lindsay

MY FRIEND IS DEAD. He was one who drank deep from life, as from a holy well. His heart burned within him like a flame and his body has been swallowed up in the earth outside Verdun. Now I can hand on some of the sayings by which he initiated me into the intense vision which illuminated his life and brought him peace.

"You ask," he said, "how it happened to me that the whole mighty and manifold universe took on the likeness of Christ. It came about gradually. It is hard to find words to analyse intuitions of that kind, which make all things new. But I can tell you some of the experiences which let the light in upon my soul, as though a curtain were lifting by fits and starts."

The Painting

"... At that time," he began, "my mind was full of a question, half philosophic, half aesthetic. Imagine, I thought, that Christ vouchsafed to manifest himself before me here, in the body, what would he look like? How would he appear? What would be his way of enfolding himself perceptibly in matter? What would be his impact on the things around him? . . . There was something disturbing, something shocking, in a confused way, in the idea that the body of Our Lord could mingle in a mundane setting with the throng of meaner bodies around him, without their experiencing and recognizing by some perceptible change, the intensity at their side.

"It happened that my eyes fell mechanically on a painting of Christ offering his heart to mankind, a painting that was hanging before me on the walls of the church where I had gone to pray. And, following my line of thought, I found it hard to understand how a painter could depict the sacred humanity of Jesus without making his body seem too specific, too absolute and thus seeming to isolate him from all other men, without making his countenance too individual, and, even if he gave it beauty, giving it some particular beauty which excluded all other forms of beauty.

"Thus, I was pondering deeply on these questions and contemplating the painting, when the vision began.

"(Although, in truth, I can hardly tell the exact

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moment when it did begin, for it was already quite intense before I became aware of it.)

"What is certain is that, as my eyes wandered over the outlines of the image I suddenly observed that they were *melting*. They were melting, but in a manner very special and difficult to describe. When I sought to discern the lines of the person of Christ, they seemed to me to be sharply drawn. And then if I relaxed my attempts at vision, the whole outline of Christ, the folds of his robe, the radiance of his hair, the bloom of his flesh, merged, as it were, but without vanishing, into all the rest. . . .

"It seemed as though the surface that separated Christ from the world about him was changing into a film of vibration in which all limits were confounded.

"I think the transformation must have started somewhere near the borders of the portrait and spread from there until it embraced the whole contour. At any rate, that was the sequence in which I became conscious of it. From that moment, in any event, the metamorphosis spread fast and overtook all things.

THE FIRST THING I NOTICED was that the vibrant atmosphere which surrounded Christ with a halo was not confined to the small space immediately about him, but that it radiated to infinity. It was shot through from time to time by what appeared to be phosphorescent trails, tracing a continuous path of light as far as the outermost spheres of matter—making a sort of plexus of blood-vessels or network of nerves throughout all substance.

"*The whole universe vibrated*. And yet when I tried to look at things one by one, I found them still as clearly defined, their individuality still preserved.

"All this movement seemed to emanate from Christ, from his heart above all. But it was while I was seeking to descry the source of the emanation and to capture its rhythm, that my attention came back to the picture itself and I saw the vision mount rapidly to its climax. . . .

"I forgot to tell you about the garments of Christ. They were luminous, as we read in the account of the Transfiguration. But what struck me most was the realization that they were not woven by art—unless the hand of the angels is the hand of matter. . . . Those were no coarse spun fibres which made up the weft. But matter, the very flower of matter, had woven itself of its own accord in the inmost of its substance, like some miraculous tissue. And it seemed to me that the stitches flowed indefinitely, harmoniously combined in a natural design destined for them from their first beginning.

"But you will understand that I had only a casual eye for this garment miraculously woven by the continuous co-operation of all the energies and all the order of matter. It was the transfigured countenance of the Master which attracted and captivated all my attention.

"You have often seen, by night, how some stars change their colour, from pearls of blood, to violets of gleaming velvet. And you have seen the shifting iris on a transparent bubble.

"Thus, in an inexpressible iridescence there shone on the changeless countenance of Jesus the lights and tints of all our beauties. I cannot tell whether it was at the behest of my own desires or at the will of him who ruled and knew my tastes. What is certain is that these innumerable shades of majesty, of gentleness, of irresistible attraction, succeeded each other, were transformed and merged into each other with a harmony which appeased me to the full.

"And always behind this shifting surface, supporting it, concentrating it in a higher unity, there floated the incommunicable beauty of Christ. . . . That beauty, too, I divined rather than perceived. For whenever I tried to pierce the layers of inferior beauty which concealed it from me, other particular and fragmentary beauties rose up which veiled from me *the True Beauty*, while making me foresee and desire it.

"The whole countenance was radiant in this way. But the source of the radiance and the iridescence was hidden in the eyes of the transfigured portrait.

"Over the profound splendour of those eyes there passed, like a rainbow, the reflection (or it may have been the creative form, the idea) of everything that charms, everything that lives. . . .

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And the luminous simplicity of their fire resolved itself, as I endeavoured to master it, into an inexhaustible complexity, in which were united all the looks in which a human heart was ever warmed and mirrored. Those eyes, for example, at first so gentle and tender that it might have been my mother before me, became an instant afterwards as passionate and subjugating as those of a woman—and yet so imperiously pure that under their dominance no false feeling was physically possible. And then they were filled in turn with a great and manly majesty, like the look you can read in the eyes of a very brave or a very strong man, but incomparably more lofty and more delightful to undergo.

"But while I was ardently gazing deep into the eyes of Christ, and saw them become a bottomless well of fascinating and blazing life, lo, from the depths of those same eyes, I saw, as it were, a cloud mounting which overcast and engulfed all that I have just described. An extraordinary and intense expression spread gradually over the changing shades of the divine countenance, first impregnating them and then absorbing them.

"And I stood dumbfounded.

"For this ultimate expression, which dominated and summed up all the rest, *I could not decipher*. I could not say whether it betrayed unspeakable agony or an excess of triumphant joy. I only know that since then I seem to have discerned it once again in the eyes of a dying soldier.

"At once my eyes were veiled with tears. And when I could see again, the painting of Christ in the church had resumed its too sharp lines and its motionless features."

MY SPIRIT had always been naturally pantheistic,"* continued my friend. "I felt its inborn and unconquerable aspirations, but I did not dare to give them free rein because I could not reconcile them with my faith. After these experiences and others like them, I can safely say that I have found a life-long unexhausted interest and an unalterable peace.

"I live in the heart of a single element, the centre and the detail of All—personal love and cosmic power.

"In attaining it and merging myself with it, I have the whole universe in front of me, with its noble endeavours, its entrancing search for knowledge, with its myriads of souls to be perfected and healed. I can and must plunge breathlessly into the midst of human labour. The greater share I take, the more weight I will bring to bear on the whole surface of the real, the nearer I will attain to Christ and the faster I shall grapple myself to him.

"We could say that God, eternal being in himself, *for us* is in the process of formation everywhere around us.

"And God, too, is *the Heart of Everything*. This is so true that the vast setting of the universe might founder or perish or be snatched away from me by death without diminishing my fundamental joy. When that dust is scattered that was made animate by a halo of power and glory, there still remains untouched the reality of substance in which all perfection is subsumed and incorruptible. The rays are refracted in their source, and there, all converged, I would still hold them.

"That is why I am not disconcerted, even by war itself. In a few days we shall be hurled into an offensive to recover Douaumont—a magnificent feat, which I see as the symbol of a positive advance of the world in the liberation of souls. I tell you this. I shall go into it religiously, with all my soul, borne by an impetus in which I cannot tell where human passion ends and adoration begins.

"And if it should be my lot not to come back from those heights, I would like my body to rest embedded in the clay of the forts like a living cement which God has cast between the stones of the New City."

Those were the words which my dear friend spoke to me one October evening, the man whose soul was instinctively in communion with the unique life of all things and whose body now reposes, as he wished, somewhere in a wild land.

* A very real pantheism (in the etymological sense of the word; *En pâsi panta Theos*, that is, in Saint Paul's words, *God all in all*), but an absolutely legitimate pantheism; for if, in the last analysis, Christians are in effect no more than "one with God" this state is reached not by identification (God becoming all) but by the differentiating and communicating action of love (God all *in all*)—which is essentially orthodox.—*Footnote added by the Author.*

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Rocco Fumento

NEIGHBORS and CROSSES

MRS. CIMBRONI is one of those women who, perhaps, has never in her life committed an evil act and yet whom one instinctively and immediately dislikes. She was, indeed, a pitiable creature. Yet we, her neighbors on Chestnut Street hill, laughed at her or were irritated by her and, at times, even became infuriated with her. She was our cross, we sighed, and yet she was certainly harmless enough. We knew we were being unkind to her, we sometimes grudgingly admitted, and we promised ourselves we would be more charitable the next time she stalked us on the street or trapped us at the church door. But the next time became like the last time, with Mrs. Cimbroni grinning idiotically and benignly at us and plying us with her interminable questions, and soon we were angry at her for causing us to break that promise and angry at ourselves for lacking the patience, the decency, the compassion to put up with her.

Earlier, before that last night of Mrs. Argento's wake, we had no good reason at all to explain our attitude towards Mrs. Cimbroni or to excuse our utter contempt for her. Oh, we sought to justify ourselves with reasons and excuses enough. Her very appearance, we said, revolted us. Even the most charitable among us admitted that she was ugly. Her body, undoubtedly, had never known the confines of a corset. This part of her flopped and that part of her bulged when she walked—no, waddled—she was a squat and quivering Vesuvio. Indecent, the neighbors said. Grotesque. We ought to chip in and buy her a corset for Christmas, they said.

Yes, a corset might indeed improve her figure, but there was nothing to be done about her face, we agreed. It was pockmarked and as wrinkled as the dry, black olives in Tuselli's import market, and from it her moist little eyes peered inquisitively at us. The least charitable among us were certain that she shaved, only she ought to sharpen her razor, they added with a snicker. Her hair, a dull, spiritless gray, was swept up in a witch's bun on the top of her head, but the pins were unable to hold all the stray ends and they fell over her forehead like wispy rat tails.

Her clothes, too, outraged our sensibilities. *La Zingara* was our nickname for her because, we said, she most certainly dressed like a gypsy. Wild, floral prints, she wore, and garish checks and wide, multi-colored stripes and mismated skirts and blouses. "Don't you know?" Mrs. Albero laughed. "She picks them up for fifty cents at the Salvation Army." We were certain she didn't own a single hat. Instead she wore an incredible assortment of the most brilliantly colored kerchiefs—vivid greens and shocking reds and sickly purples—which she tied beneath her chin

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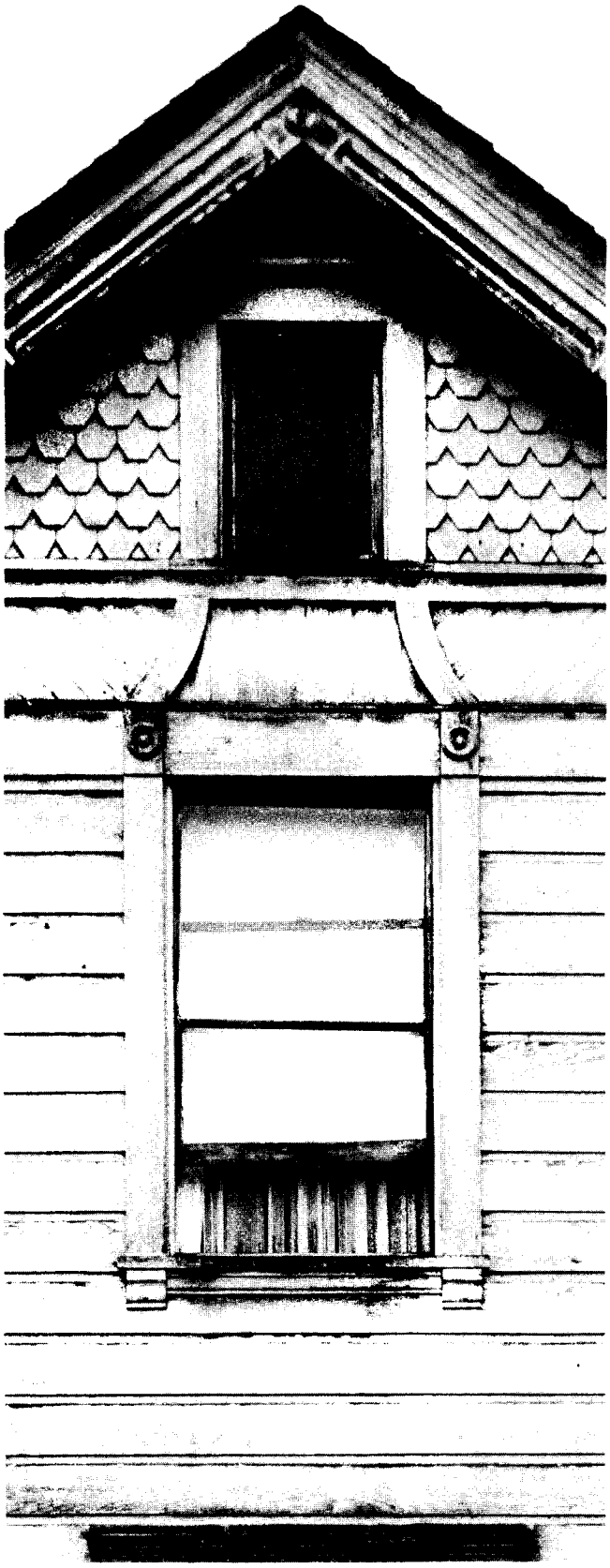
with the most savage of knots. Do you see now why we thought her a grotesquerie?

We always knew when Mrs. Cimbroni was in church, no matter if it were crowded and she sat, as usual, way down in front beneath the very eyes of Saint Andrew himself and we sat near the exit under the projecting choir loft. The choir sang and suddenly there she was. Her *O Salutaris*, we felt certain, reached even the Baptists and Methodists half-way across town. Her voice didn't soar above the others, no. It pushed and elbowed and bludgeoned its way to the top until, finally, it triumphantly hurled every other voice off-key. We said the rosary or recited a litany and Mrs. Cimbroni was our maestro. Her voice hissed furiously or joyously or mournfully, prodding us into an allegretto, holding us back to an andante, confounding us with a minuetto. Even the startled baritone of Father Morelli eventually wavered beneath its onslaught.

Not content merely to badger us in church, Mrs. Cimbroni energetically pursued us in the streets. If we were fortunate enough to spot her before she spotted us, we fled into the opposite direction or darted into the five and ten or plunged into an alley. But for an old woman her eyesight was remarkably good and if she saw us first, which was too often, she descended upon us with the seven furies of hell snapping at her heels —elbowing, pushing, stepping on toes, waving at us and hysterically shouting our names as though we were prodigal children happily and miraculously returned to the fold. People stared at her or cursed her or laughed at her while we tried not to look embarrassed and prepared ourselves for the barrage of questions.

"How's your mother? What does the doctor say about her backaches? Did your sister have her baby? Her husband was laid off last week, no? And what will the poor thing do now? When are you getting married? You want to raise a family, no?" And she smiled her benign and idiotic smile and exposed her few yellow teeth and, like a priest bestowing a generous benediction with holy water, joyously sprinkled us with spittle.

At a christening, a shower, a wedding, before the inevitable arrival of Mrs. Cimbroni, invited



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or not, she was the center of outraged talk. Always sticking her nose in the business of others, the neighbors said. Always wanting to know how much this costs and how much that costs, whether or not you paid cash or bought it on time, whether so and so was going through the change of life, whether Tommy Puserino was helping to support his poor aged mother, whether you went to Mass on All Saints Day and whether you made your Easter Duty.

Not only was she nosey, they said, but she was a vulture, too—a horrid little creature who received sustenance from the dead. It's her pastime, they smiled grimly. Somebody dies, even a stranger, and there's Mrs Cimbroni sitting by the casket every single night during the wake. And there she is at the funeral Mass and there she is at the cemetery. God give us the strength to outlive Mrs. Cimbroni, they said.

When she came visiting—uninvited, of course—the neighbors huddled away from the windows and pretended not to be at home. But sometimes the radio or T.V. or a baby's cry gave them away and suddenly there was Mrs. Cimbroni grinning at the threshold. "You didn't hear me knock, I think, and so I just pushed open the door. Now you sit and finish your supper, you hear? I'll only stay a moment." But she stayed for hours. "Is Rosa coming home for Christmas? What does her husband do? Ah, a mechanic! He makes good money, no? And how many children does she have now?"

Though Mrs. Cimbroni managed to find out a great deal about us, except when we formed a conspiracy against her and boldly told her outrageous lies, we never knew much about her. There'd been a husband once, but no one remembered what happened to him. Some of the neighbors insisted he was dead; others, the more malicious ones, were certain he was very much alive but had fled from his wife some years ago. Now he was back in Italy, they said, and was living like a king on his social security. There'd been a son, too. The rumors about him were more numerous—he, too, is dead; no he's in the merchant marine; impossible, he's married and lives in Pittsfield and is a foreman in the G.E. and never comes to visit his mother; oh, no, he's a gangster in Chicago.

All we really knew about Mrs. Cimbroni was that she went to Mass daily; that she made all the novenas and attended all the retreats, even those in English, which she could hardly speak and barely understood; that she lived in a three-room flat near the foot of Chestnut Street hill and that she earned a meager living by crocheting bedspreads and tablecloths. She crocheted beautifully, everyone grudgingly admitted, and bought many a shower or wedding gift from her.

But do you see the petty reasons for which we disliked Mrs. Cimbroni? Yes, she was most certainly a grotesquerie and she annoyed us in church and she talked too much and asked too many questions and arrived uninvited at too many places. "Yet in many ways she's a living saint," we were sometimes forced to admit. "Almost every Saturday she baby-sits for me," Anna Brucietti said, "and never does she take a penny. She rocks my little Flora and sings those crazy lullabies from the old country and Flora loves her, I think. Can you imagine?" "For me she was the answer to a prayer," Lina Simolini reluctantly conceded. "Do you remember when I fell last year and broke my hip? Didn't she do all my spring cleaning?" "And look at the beautiful altar cloths she makes for Saint Andrew's," Mrs. Faustino added.

Others complained of the heavy crosses they bore, but not Mrs. Cimbroni. If she had a cross, she bore it secretly and stoically, with an indomitable—stupid, some called it—fortitude and with cheerfulness. Yes, some of us, sometimes, saw the inherent goodness and nobility of Mrs. Cimbroni, and still we could not help disliking her.

Then, in mid-winter, our dear Mrs. Argento died. The first week of Lent it was when a deep, moist snow hugged the earth and it was impossible to drive a car up Chestnut Street. Cielino's hearse, even with chains and Cielino's goddamns, could not make it to the Argento house and finally Pepe, who delivered fish to the hill, brought the casket in his fish wagon, which he always fitted with runners, like a sleigh, whenever it snowed.

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In spite of the bad weather all the neighbors, of course, went to Mrs. Argento's wake. She was a woman we all loved and who'd borne her share of crosses, everyone agreed, from the time her daughter Viola ran off with a married man, a stranger from Stewart Street and, worse, a non-Italian, until her husband died early in the previous fall. When Pepe—a new Pepe who spoke in hushed tones and who'd suddenly acquired an immense and solemn dignity in a blue serge suit—arrived with the body at the Argento home, there was Mrs. Cimbroni already seated in the parlor. By the time Cielino, crushed because a prized client had to be delivered in a fish wagon instead of his beautiful, new hearse, opened the coffin Mrs. Cimbroni was pressing eagerly at his elbow.

"Oh, how nice she looks," we heard her say to Clara, Mrs. Argento's oldest daughter. "Where did you ever find such a beautiful dress? Did you buy it in Pittsfield? Why it's pure silk, isn't it? Now, now, you mustn't weep, you know. Surely the dear soul's in heaven and so why do you weep? She has suffered much and now she's found joy and peace with God and all His saints. That's what you must tell yourself, my dear. Oh my, Mr. Cielino put rouge on her cheeks. She wouldn't like that, I think. You know your mother never in her life wore a bit of rouge or powder. . . ."

"Oh, please be quiet," Clara sobbed. "Please, please be quiet," and we all shook our heads and clucked our tongues at Mrs. Cimbroni.

Mrs. Cimbroni turned to us and whispered. "Poor Clara. She loved her mother dearly, I know, and yet she's with God, isn't she? Well, perhaps not yet—perhaps she must stop in purgatory a bit, but that's why we must pray, no? To make her visit a nice, short one?" And we were grateful when she took out her rosary beads and began to pray, for only prayer ever effectively silenced Mrs. Cimbroni.

Yes, that was something else we could say in her behalf. Prayer, it seemed, took her away from us, made her temporarily unaware of our existence. It was as though she were miraculously swept up into a sealed, airborne telephone booth which was mysteriously hooked up to a private line stretched out directly to God. Oh, she's just a hypocrite, some of the neighbors said. She only pretends she's carried off that way. That's what she'd like us to believe—that she's a pious little saint, the hypocrite. Hypocrite or not, prayer did silence her. Of course it didn't really silence her because we heard her spitting and sighing out her Hail Marys all over the place. But it did prevent her from talking and for that, at least, we thanked God.

IT WAS THE THIRD AND LAST evening of the wake and we wished to go home and yet waited impatiently for Father Morelli to come and lead us in a final recitation of the rosary for the repose of Mrs. Argento's soul. Yes, we'd loved Mrs. Argento and we respected her memory, but we were decidedly weary of her wake. One by one the men stealthily left the parlor and Anna Brucietti went to spy on them and came back to report that they'd started a card game in the cellar and had tapped one of the wine barrels. "They're getting stewed," she added grimly. Two days ago we would have been outraged at such behavior, but now we smiled in resignation and said, "Well, those are the ways of men and so what can we do about it?"

No one, except Mrs. Cimbroni, remained by the casket now. "Look at *La Zingara*," Mrs. Albero said. "It's like she's feasting her eyes at a banquet table."

The rest of us formed little groups and drank coffee and ate little cakes and sandwiches some of the neighbors brought and giggled at a couple of off-color jokes Lina Simolini had heard at the mill and talked of weddings and babies and miscarriages and wayward husbands and, inevitably, of Viola Argento.

"I wonder if she'll come for the funeral?" Mrs. Faustino said.

No, she wouldn't dare, most of the neighbors agreed. She didn't come when her father died, did she? Think what a scandal it would be for poor Clara—for the whole family! Clara, who no longer wept now and who clung tenaciously to her husband's hand, undoubtedly to prevent him from joining the other men in the cellar, irritably assured everyone she would throw Viola out of the house. "Papa always said she was dead and so

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let her remain dead," she added. Only Mrs. Cimbroni hoped she might come. "It would please her dear mother, I think," she said, but the neighbors only sneered at what she thought and hoped.

None of us actually knew what happened to Viola after she left the hill. Some said she was still living with the stranger from Stewart Street; others insisted he's long since deserted her and that now she roamed the streets of New York, or Boston, or Worcester; the most persistent rumor was that she was operating a house in Troy and had amassed a fortune. But no matter where she was or what she was doing, she was most certainly a captive of the devil, the neighbors agreed. No, she wouldn't dare show herself at her mother's funeral.

BUT ON THAT LAST NIGHT of the wake, while we still awaited Father Morelli and while Mrs. Cimbroni knelt at Mrs. Argento's feet spitting out another fervent rosary, there was Viola incredibly and miraculously transfixed in the doorway. There were gasps from the neighbors and whisperings and elbows jabbing into ribs and heads nodding frantically towards the door.

"Is it really Viola?" Anna Brucietti hissed. "Sure it's her," Mrs. Albero hissed back. "Nobody else holds her head up like that—like she was the Madonna herself, shameless creature!"

Yes, it was unmistakably Viola—the same proud shoulders, the same chin thrust arrogantly high, apparently still not giving a damn what others thought or said about her, apparently still the unrepentant sinner. She was older, certainly, and much thinner than we'd remembered her, but almost as beautiful. More beautiful than she had a right to be, some of the neighbors undoubtedly thought, and so discovered another reason for damning her.

Viola hesitated at the threshold as though waiting for someone to draw her into the house. Surely any one of us had reasons enough to go to her—Mrs. Faustino, who'd been her sponsor at confirmation; Anna Brucietti, who'd chosen her to be maid of honor at her wedding; Lina Simolini, who'd gone to school with her and worked side by side with her in the mill; Mrs. Albero, who'd knelt with her at the first communion rail. No, I should have gone to her. "You're my dearest friend," I'd confided to her once, and hadn't I made her my confessor and revealed all my despairs and all my impossible dreams to her? But those few steps across the room beneath the astonished, condemning eyes of the neighbors were too many; her isolation from us was too complete. Anyway, wasn't it her family's duty to greet her? As the oldest, Clara ought to have gone to her. But all Clara did was to cling stupidly to her husband's hand and whimper, "Father Morelli's coming any minute and what will we say to him? What will he think when he sees her?"

She might at least have thrown Viola out of the house, as she said she would. Yes, it was cruel to leave her standing there alone; cruel to allow us to see the proud shoulders beginning to sag and the arrogant chin hidden suddenly behind a black-gloved hand as she stared dumbly at her mother's casket. Only Mrs. Cimbroni, still hissing out her Hail Marys, seemed unaware of Viola's presence in the doorway; seemed unaware of the stirrings and agitated coughs and whisperings of the neighbors.

Abruptly the hissing stopped and Mrs. Cimbroni made the sign of the cross and jerked herself back among us. She arose clumsily and looked about her with those sharp, inquisitive eyes, like a house manager rapidly counting heads and assessing profits. Then she saw Viola and immediately that benign, idiotic smile brightened her face and she, who had no reason in the world to go to her, hurled herself across the room, tripping over Mrs. Faustino's chair, thrusting aside Clara and her husband.

"Ah, what a dear, good girl you are to come," we heard her say to Viola and saw her grasp Viola's hands.

Then the most extraordinary thing happened. Our proud, arrogant, unrepentant Viola flung her arms convulsively about Mrs. Cimbroni. Can you imagine? What a terrible and ludicrous sight! Yes, there she stood clinging to this most despicable and ridiculous of creatures, clinging to this . . . this stranger as though she were the person she loved most in all the world.

Can you see now why we so detest Mrs. Cimbroni?

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ACHIEVEMENT IN AMERICAN

CAN MODERN LITERATURE BE "CATHOLIC"? Should it be? Must it inevitably reflect "the poisoned source" of Pascal, his inquietude and darkness, rather than the harmony and lucidity possible to Dante and Racine? Is a "modern Catholic writer" merely a Catholic who happens to write? Or is he a sort of vigil-keeper on those outposts where Faith and Darkness mingle, a casuist-without-credentials explaining Rome to the barbarians? Does he have a "mission" for which he will be boomed by his fellow-Catholics —and then fattened for an *auto-da-fé?* Must we be perpetually edified by the spectacle of the *bien-pensant* scandalized by Bloy, of the schoolmarmish Maritain rapping the knuckles of Mauriac and the erring Cocteau, of Mauriac himself shocked by *Bacchus*, of Julian Green reproaching Montherlant for using Christianity without believing in it, of Bernanos ringed by his grim little Feeney-esque claque, of Waugh with his Jockey Club snobbism surveying the "sooties," of the Newman Club theologians cataloguing the major and the minor heresies in Graham Greene, of Lord Acton and Péguy and many another dying on the prudent edge of ex-communication only to survive as "saints" of an Age of Anxiety, of . . . ?

These questions throng to one like mocking ghosts, beyond Good and Evil, beyond exorcism even. They are like Rumpelstiltskin or the riddles that were put to Oedipus, and the answers one can find for them are dream-answers adapted to an earlier and more innocent age. There will always be people who complain that Mauriac and Graham Greene are "not Catholic enough": just as their earlier avatars complained that Torquemada didn't burn enough heretics. The question, *Who is Catholic?*, arises, so, since I intend to discuss "achievement" in American Catholic poetry, let me define a Catholic poet as "a poet, *quod vide*, baptized into the Roman Catholic confession and positively influenced by its tenets to manifest them in a striking and unique way in his writings." The term "poet," if it is taken in any serious sense, immediately eliminates most American Catholics who versified before 1940 (the year of Robert Lowell's conversion), as it also eliminates the Phyllis McGinleys of this world, the Butterick Pattern Balladeers. After some side-glances to the earlier British achievement, I examine the American scene in the last twenty-five years as reflected in the work of the best American Catholic poets: Robert Lowell, Allen Tate, Robert Fitzgerald, Brother Antoninus, John Frederick Nims, and Dunstan Thompson.

JUST A FEW YEARS AGO, poets such as these would have been undreamed of even in *our* philosophy. The influence of earlier American Catholic poets hardly extended beyond their individual parishes. There are reasons and reasons for this: if one can envision, say, Old Goody Two-Shrouds composedly floating off triolets to the Little Flower, as she spins the bingo wheel, rolls bandages, fans the fevered, inculcates the Euclidean elements among patient dodecahedrons fresh from the non-Euclidean slums—one has seen an Early American Catholic Poet At Work. These blithe spirits—how far they seem from the anguished authenticity, the true cry of *Creation!* rising from the pages of a Hopkins or a Robert Lowell. For the great religious artist is like Rouault: a lonely figure suffering in the catacombs of the self, even when he seems to be only joyously praising in an opulent outward summer-dazzled art. Mediocre rosary-versifiers will go on as before—all the car-fumes of Suburbia cannot quell *those* little hands—but the presence of a Tate or a Lowell should leaven in time the lumpish offerings of Catholic literati.

What of the "Catholic anthologies" issued in America? Kilmer's collection of 1917 contains not even one readable American poet. It does offer Lionel Johnson and three poems by Hopkins. But it relies on the familiar British horrors: Belloc and Dowson and the Meynells and Patmore and *The Hound of Heaven*. This is truly a "standard anthology." Dr. James Edward Tobin brought it "up to date" in 1955 by means of a series of ill-starred raids on the cloisters. The

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Catholic Poetry.

Harry Stiehl

Kilmer-Tobin anthology which contains, give or take a row, a bleachers-sized selection of nuns (Dr. Tobin reminds one of that mad Roman dowager in *Caprice* who could never stir forth for her constitutional without "a string of nuns" attached to her) as well as "every Catholic poet of any importance of the last hundred years" had however no room for Allen Tate, Robert Fitzgerald, Brother Antoninus, Robert Lowell, or Dunstan Thompson.

These poets fare better in France, where the bourgeois knows that he is living in the Age of Things American, where Gide's ghost searches on the twilight quais for a stray paperback McCullers or Styron or Capote, where *Guides Illustrés de l'Ecole Nashville* hobnob on shelves with Sorbonnesque analyses of the Locofocoist influences on J. F. K. Flipping through a current fat NRF anthology of *Trente-Cinq Jeunes Poetès Americains*, shuffling the familiar and near-familiar names in pursuit of the monochromatic rainbow of their poems translated "from the American," seeing Lowell's brassily disenchanted, "I was once the apple of your eye," bewitched, a bumpkin, into the meiosis of "*Jétais jadis ta prunelle*," a cultivated American may shudder as *he* appreciates. But cultivated Americans should be accustomed by now to having American Literature "arranged" abroad at Summit Conferences on Literary Criticism by Crypto-Byzantine Explicators droning in a prose of the consistency, though hardly the flavour, of Metrecal. And those who have come through "the tranquillized idiocy of the Eisenhower years" with *some* mother-wit surviving, are accustomed by now to *anything*: Do-It-Yourself Genocide; the Mah-Jongg Megaton Game, etc. "Booth evaded the fame he sought, by speaking/ justly of Lincoln, *sic semper tyrannis*./ It was banal enough to be immortal."

Banal enough to be emetic have been some of the European judgments on American poets, yet Europeans understand the significance, say, of Whitman far better than do those American "New Critics" who treat Whitman more or less as *Blowzalinda, The Mulattress Who Was Born Invisible*. American poetry, alas, begins with Whitman, who exclaimed in 1855," I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable," adding with wistful bravado, "I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world." Tamed now into a Babel's-Tower of tongues, Whitman continues to irritate the over-refined of this world. And who now reads Longfellow—or Whittier or those other Anglophile spinsters who knitted and purled interminably through the long New England winters? The New England tradition was often arid, flowered in its finest artist, Robinson, and is dead today. Only Robert Lowell writes in the shadow of that tradition, but Lowell has been so much influenced by Elizabethan and Baroque excesses that he is really apart from it. Let me stress my admiration of Whitman's "open form" rather than the "closed form" of the Concord Academics, since I elsewhere prefer "closed form" (rhyme and meter) in English and American poetry.

The notion of "open form" came to national attention as a result of the 1957 *Howl* obscenity trial, that amusing circus which consoled so many of us for having missed the Scopes trial. Most poets—whatever they stated officially—detested *Howl*. But the real civic resistance to *Howl* came from conservative Catholics. How they knew its contents without reading it, is something marvellous. One assumed that they had, by a superior osmosis, absorbed it through their closed and anguished eyelids, murmuring *Vade retro me, Satanas!* helplessly the while. Justice triumphed—and now Ginsberg sounds his barbaric yawn over the networks of the world. Schoolgirl graffiti, it's true, doesn't appeal to everyone. The true iconoclasts among us leaf through *Howl*, smile like Madame du Deffand placing some witless parvenu, and fling it gaily as a sop to Cerberus before descending into the real regions of the damned.

Most of the better Catholic poets use closed form. The Sixties have seen a kind of War of the

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Poets, with most of the critical artillery on the closed side. The battle-lines shaped up early: the Evergreen Pixies flew forward with the Grove chrestomathy of *The New American Poetry* in 1960 to combat an earlier closed-form Meridian collection which had been styled by one contumelious wit "*A Guide To Identical Pumpkins*, as edited by three of them." Philip Lamantia and Brother Antoninus emerge in the Grove group, but it seems to me that Lamantia belongs there mostly for his Quetzalcoatl temper-tantrums, and that Antoninus with his lonely Jeffersesque integrity does not belong there at all. Babyish and messy, the Grove collection is a sort of Miltown-party curio: if a magpie made mudpies, they would be like these. Identical fishwives, shall we say? Most of the Grove poets look at one another like rejoicing mirror-images freshly freed from the dungeon of the Constructed Poem; their "structures" have been sublimed away, along with the syntax, punctuation, and similar grammarian inessentials of the language; theirs is the tree of language as William Carlos Williams dreamed it: the only tree that is all leaves.

We have heard much of the "religious quest" of the Beatniks. Ah, those *jeunes filles en colère*—how they always sounded like the Discalced Bobby-Soxers of Switchblade Zen! (One feels about Beatniks much as one feels about Birchers: if they had never existed, it would have been necessary only to syndicate them.) The Beatniks intrigued pious circles for a spell, since they were thought to possess a "pariah integrity": there had been nothing like it since the pariah integrity of Pierpont Morgan. And the professional convert-collectors thought, "Yum-yum, more Albino Abyssinians for our conversion statistics." For, as we know, the Roman Catholic Church has cast its net in the past very wide for converts, and has drawn in some unexpected and glittering fish.

In this essay, I fear I shall have to *criticize*. How tired we all are of the rabbinical solemnity of Critics and of their great puddingstone Tablets of the Law! Yet how wonderful Criticism seems to many readers—as long as they are not the one being criticized. I too have dwelt in Cloud Cuckoo Land: I once heard an imported Englishman, a polylingual expert on Theognis, speak for several centuries on *Ode on a Grecian Urn* while neither pearls nor toads but fatuous Oxonian platitudes fell from his lips with gratifying regularity. It was quite a tableau for a mere American to witness—Norman Rockwell could have painted it for the Daughters of the American Restoration and called it *The Univac Giving Birth to General Eisenhower*—and I went home so saddened by it all that my parish godmother said to me, "No more metaphysics for *you*, my dear, until you have eaten your Mencken." Pope complained once of writers who were "sleepless themselves to give their readers sleep." Anyone who writes to enlighten the great fiction-addicted public about "modern poetry" must feel at times as if he were weaving grass spectacles for a new race of androids which has dispensed with eyes. A depressing Fate—but as Mother Sappho said when I complained to her, "*Mind your loom, honey, and weave away!*"

II

After the Reformation and the martyred Jesuits and the defection of Donne, good Catholic poetry in English is a rare commodity. And the greatest has been written by converts: Crashaw and Hopkins in England; Lowell and Tate in America. The mere list of modern converts from Newman onward is impressive and continuing. In the Anglo-Saxon world, where the Roman Catholic Church still has about it an aura of the sinister and the exotic, Catholic converts tend to the extravagant and the extreme. Lowell rightly described himself, in his early post-conversion years, as "a fire-breathing Catholic C. O." The convert in Britain blends subtly with the traditional figure of the English Eccentric, whether in his sinister (Beardsley) or hearty (Chesterton) polarities. The spectacular oddity of some of its convert votaries—a Wilde, a Beardsley, a Corvo, a Firbank—forces the Church, in England at least, to figure in the public mind as a sort of superior Rest Home For Devotional Decadents. Yet the great modern Catholic renascence in France stemmed originally from "decadent" writers like d'Aurevilly or Huysmans (or even Bloy) before it was matured by Claudel and Ber-

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nanos and Mauriac. Mauriac, who is probably (unless Joyce is) the greatest Catholic writer since the seventeenth century, has praised Verlaine and Rimbaud for keeping alive "the religious sense" in their writings even when in their lives they were debauched. And Mauriac has often stated how much he envies the convert who is privileged to "choose" the Faith.

It is both for their ardency and their sense of tragic life that we value the great English convert poets: the baroque perfervid ecstasies of Crashaw, almost Gongoristic in his "Spanish" cult of Love and Death; Hopkins, the self-styled "wretch," wrestling in the years of now done darkness with his God. In the Nineties, darker phantasmagoria float by: Wilde, tragic at last after the trial, living in exile as "Sebastian Melmoth" and dying beyond his means but in the means of Grace; Beardsley, staring into a mirror after the Wilde trial and muttering, with self-torturing anxiety, "Yes, yes, I look like a Sodomite," and then beseeching his family from his deathbed "by all that is Holy" to burn his erotica; the courtly and learned Lionel Johnson, sitting at a Dublin lodging-house table with drunkards sprawled about him, drunk himself but with head erect and saying in a clear unshaken voice, "I believe in nothing but the Holy Roman Catholic Church." One accuses the Nineties converts of an excessively melodramatic sense of sin, only to realize that Francis Thompson has it as well: "Not where the wheeling systems darken,/ And our benumbed conceiving soars!/ The drift of pinions, would we hearken,/ Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors." Had he written more often with such concentrated strength, Francis Thompson might be a major exhibit of modern Catholic poetry. But after World War One the reputation of Thompson sank as the glory of Hopkins was revealed by Robert Bridges. In *The Wreck of the Deutschland* and in a dozen matchless sonnets which even men deeply hostile to Catholicism have committed to memory, Hopkins is like the fulcrum that can move the world.

If Hopkins has come into his glory, Lionel Johnson has never received his due. Johnson's poems are "marmoreal" at times, but they are always preferable to the effortless insipidity of Coventry Patmore or the refined *aquarelliste* devotions of Mrs. Meynell. Yeats, when he first heard Johnson read his *By The Statue of King Charles at Charing Cross*, felt that he had listened to a great speech: "The splendid silence clings/ Around me: and around/ The saddest of all kings/ Crowned, and again discrowned." But *The Dark Angel* is Johnson's masterpiece. Yeats, after quoting from *The Dark Angel*, was moved to inquire: "Why are these strange souls born everywhere today, with hearts that Christianity, as shaped by history, cannot satisfy?" Yet he could feel that Johnson's poetry, like Johnson himself before his last decay, conveys an emotion of joy, of intellectual clearness of hard energy; he gave us of his triumph." The fascinating Johnson is for us today, as he was for Yeats, a kind of triumphant failure, a lay whisky-priest torn between alcoholism and Aquinas. And Yeats wondered: "Did the austerity, the melancholy of his thoughts, that spiritual ecstasy which he touched at times, heighten, as complementary colours heighten one another, not only the Vision of Evil, but its fascination? Was it only Villon, or did Dante also feel the fascination of evil when shown in its horror, and, as it were, judged and lost; and what proud man does not feel temptation strengthened from the certainty that his intellect is not deceived?"

Johnson died in 1902, Thompson in 1907, and English Catholic poetry ran aridly into the sands of . . . Chesterbelloc. In the Twenties, the late Roy Campbell came out of South Africa; his translations of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, of Calderón and San Juan de la Cruz, his magnificent monograph on Lorca, are the cream of that prodigious talent which was flawed at times by rhetoricism and coarse satirical effects. During the Thirties, Campbell and Waugh (Greene was not popularly identified as a Catholic until 1940) represented English literary Catholicism in the popular mind; it was fashionable then to murmur against their supposed "fascism." The principal British Catholic poet at present is Edith Sitwell. Some say Dame Edith is now a major poet. Her apprentice work rather suggested Alice in Disneyland recollecting Apollinaire, but her Hiroshima-shadowed elegies are more rewarding. An even more hallu-

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cinated religious poet is David Gascoyne, who came out of Surrealism's fur-lined teacup; who is "mad," anguished, fashionable; but who is not a Catholic, although he has been influenced by Jouve and the French Catholic poets.

IN THE CAREER OF GASCOYNE, the ghosts of the Nineties poets throng by with beseeching voices. David Emery Gascoyne was born in 1916 and early evinced the restless gifts of a Radiguet: his first book of poems (*Roman Balcony And Other Poems*, 1932) came out when he was sixteen; a lively novel (*Opening Day*, 1933) followed. Educated at a London polytechnic school, he was able to evade the rather stultifying effects of an English public school education—effects which were then being exploited with adolescent braggadocio by the Auden Circle. Through the owner of the Parton Press, he met George Barker and Dylan Thomas, two other young Romantics dissatisfied with the dominant Auden idiom; they were soon to be recognized as a new poetic "triumvirate." England to Auden was the country where nobody was well, but to Gascoyne it seemed that suburbia where nobody was mad. He crossed the Channel to France, was drawn into the Surrealist circle of Breton and Eluard, and wrote the sprightly and horrific *Short Survey of Surrealism* (1935). It was his effort to *épater le bourgeois*, and it was quickly reinforced by a collection of his own poems in the Surrealist manner, *Man's Life Is This Meat* (1936), which established him, at the age of twenty, as the leading British Surrealist. Turning to translation, he offered in *Hölderlin's Madness* (1938) some rather bizarre imitations of Hölderlin. He was also reading deeply in Jouve and other Catholic writers and moving toward a more tragic conception of History. In the nightmare days of World War Two appeared his major collection, *Poems 1937-1942*, with the strange crucified thorn-decorations of Graham Sutherland. The masterpieces of this volume—*Miserere*, *Ecce Homo*, *Gravel Pit Field*—express Christian mystical views, yet David Gascoyne remains still outside the Church, "waiting on the sill." In a later collection (*A Vagrant*, 1951) and in the religious masque *Night Thoughts* (1956), the tension and strain, the recherché imagery and Gothic atmosphere of Gascoyne's earlier writings have been dispelled. The later poetry is powerful, but less individual than the nightmares of the war years. Perhaps it was the War itself which drew from Gascoyne a greater expense of spirit: the one challenge, the one moment of greatness.

Crashaw remains the finest English Catholic devotional poet—at least, since the Reformation—with Hopkins a close second. And in the Nineties poets, in a few satiric epigrams of Belloc and Campbell, in Sitwell's *Street Song*, there is to be observed a subsidiary, but still impressive, achievement.

III

THE NON-SPECIALIST may still be properly skeptical: can there possibly be any *American* Catholic poets who are even readable? Remembering the literary history of the Church in America, he is ready to consign to oblivion a surfeit of insufferable Hibernians and a whole host of the lady-lilters in and out of wimples—those Sisters of the Flaming Quill who agitate with an egregious ardour the parochial publications. He knows that among the memorable Catholic poets of the nineteenth century, there are no American names. The historian of Catholic letters in America must be content merely to note the existence of a Louise Imogen Guiney or a Father Tabb, and to beckon the reader on to our disturbing modernity.

The Renascence of great Catholic poetry in English dates from 1930, the year of Eliot's *Ash Wednesday* and of the influential second edition of the poems of Hopkins. Two years later occurred the conversion of Raymond Larsson, the first of a series of remarkable conversions among American poets: Thomas Merton in 1938; Robert Lowell in 1940; William Everson in 1949; Allen Tate in 1950. Together with such "born Catholics" as Robert Fitzgerald, John Frederick Nims, and Dunstan Thompson, these converts form a nucleus of genuine achievement around which newer Catholic poets may cluster. The claims on our attention of certain native religious—Sister Mary Madeleva, Sister Mary Jeremy, Sister Miriam of the Holy Spirit, Fray Chavez—

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are occasionally valid, but none of these has powers at all out of the ordinary: they all write in the median or Felicia Hemans style of their pietistic congeners the world over.

ONE FUNCTION OF CRITICISM IS EVALUATION. Tate and Lowell are easily the finest of the American Catholic poets; both belong among the dozen or so best poets in the entire "cycle of American literature," whether pagan, pious, crypto-Christian, or whatever. Tate and Lowell, along with Fitzgerald, Antoninus, and Dunstan Thompson, have made a distinguished, indeed unique, contribution to American letters.

And the others? Nims has never been able to eliminate certain irritating stylistic mannerisms; his show of brilliance is seldom supported by a precise intelligence or a secure sense of taste. But he has a genuine gift, and his later poems are better than the Shapiro-esque baubles of his salad days. Raymond Larsson's value is merely historical, and his work in bulk does not wear very well: except for a few strong poems and scattered passages lost in longer works, he is too diffuse and derivative; at times the echoes of Eliot and MacLeish rise like a chorus of parrots ("O city cities Chicago Carthage London Rome Paris and Athens and Peking O city cities") embarrassed and embarrassing, and the reader drifts among dreamscapes out of Freud and Frazer while *Weialala leia* is wailed out with empty monotony by the Rhine Daughters disguised as Jazz Age bathing beauties. At his best, Larsson has a shimmering shot-silk texture and a thin, sea-haunted music; at his worst, he looks forward to Charles Olson, the yo-yo Subterraneans, and Little Black Mumbo-Jumbo. Thomas Merton, the best known of all the American Catholic poets, lacks a personal rhythm and that sense of "necessity" which so strongly informs his prose. The younger poets are "promising," but what they promise I don't pretend to know: the function of criticism is not prophecy.

In point of age, the significant poets tend to divide neatly into two compact generations: the Tate Generation (Tate, Fitzgerald) and the Lowell Generation (Antoninus, Nims, Thompson, Lowell.)

IV

CALMER, MORE "INTELLECTUAL" than the Lowell Generation, the Tate Generation takes its name from a great poet, novelist, and man of letters.

Allen Tate was born in 1899 into a Southern family then resident in Kentucky, but originally from Virginia (the milieu of his great novel, *The Fathers*); he was educated at Vanderbilt in Nashville, where, in conjunction with John Crowe Ransom and other intellectuals, he founded the magazine, *The Fugitive*, in 1922. The "Fugitives" were poets of Southern background who prized intellection and irony in poetry, who were dazzled with the possibilities of "the metaphysical strategy," and who looked to T. S. Eliot as a master. The irascible and ironical young Tate, who was even then regarded as the "genius" of the group (he might be designated the Du Bellay of the Southern Pléiade), found another master among the poets of his own age: Hart Crane. In 1925, he made a trip north to New York to meet Crane, whose suicide in 1932 was an emotional factor in the later conversion of Tate. The atmosphere of these years is skillfully evoked by Caroline Gordon in her novel, *The Malefactors* (1956).

Tate has written, over a long and distinguished career, three very complex masterpieces of modern poetry which subsume the essential themes of his three major periods of production: the *Ode to the Confederate Dead* (1926-1936), which is the most famous, and probably the finest, of the great tormented period which closes with *Selected Poems* (1937); the marvellous elegy *Seasons of the Soul* (1944), which defines an ethos of desolated atheism; the beautifully sustained *terza rima* meditation, *The Buried Lake* (1953), from the series of Catholic poems written soon after his conversion. From first to last, his themes are consistent and profound, so that his poetry, more than that of any other modern poet except Eliot and Auden, charts the religious journey of an intellectual.

One of the finest of his early poems is *The Cross* which Hart Crane much admired and which Yvor Winters has pronounced to be one

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of the great lyrics in English. The famous conclusion describes the modern intellectuals who are cut off from the community of faith: "So blind, in so severe a place/ (All life before in the black grave)/ The last alternatives they face/ Of life, without the life to save,/ Being from all salvation weaned—/ A stag charged both at heel and head:/ Who would come back is turned a fiend/ Instructed by the fiery dead." The precarious assurance of the casually ironic "from all salvation weaned" is given the lie by the hallucinated atmosphere of the context. A despairing line from *The Meaning of Death* sums up the first period's Arnoldian outlook: "We are the eyelids of defeated caves."

IN THE SECOND PERIOD—represented by the volume *The Winter Sea* (1944)—the poet writes a second series of *Sonnets at Christmas* which comment on some earlier guilt-haunted sonnets. The rejection of Christianity is absolute and arrogant: "Ten years are time enough to be dismayed/ By mummy Christ, head crammed between his knees." And in the elegy for John Peale Bishop, *Seasons of the Soul*, Tate announces laconically that "the drying God above,/ Hanged in his windy steeple,/ No longer bears for us/ The living wound of love." But the most revealing passage in the poetry of this period is the closing section of *Winter Mask*: "I asked the master Yeats/ Whose great style could not tell/ Why it is man hates/ His own salvation,/ Prefers the way to hell,/ And finds his last safety/ In the self-made curse that bore/ Him toward damnation:/ The drowned undrowned by the sea,/ The sea worth living for." The language is restrained and classical, but behind its calmly-mastered terror rises the demon-driven figure of Hart Crane ("the self-made curse"). Tate's way to the Cross was near at hand. It is significant that in this same year (1944), he noted in his preface to Robert Lowell's *Land of Unlikeness*: "Christopher Dawson has shown in long historical perspective that material progress may mask social and spiritual decay. But the spiritual decay is not universal, and in a young man like Lowell, whether we like his Catholicism or not, there is at least a memory of the spiritual dignity of man, now sacrificed to mere secularization and a craving for mechanical order."

DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR, he became a close friend of the Maritains; in 1950 he was received into the Roman Catholic Church. His first volume thereafter was a volume of literary and social criticism, *The Forlorn Demon* (1952), reflecting profound Catholic insights. From 1944 until his conversion in 1950, he wrote very little poetry, but his conversion afforded him an emotional release which he has lately applied to a rather Augustinian examination of his past. Three sections—*The Maimed Man*, *The Swimmers*, *The Buried Lake*—of a long (and still unfinished) poem in *terza rima* appeared in the quarterlies; *The Swimmers* and *The Buried Lake* were included in the definitive 1961 edition of Tate's *Poems*.

Tate's best poems—that handful of them which will survive as well as any American poems of this age—are: *The Mediterranean*; the conclusion of *To The Lacedemonians; Ode to the Confederate Dead; Seasons of the Soul; Mother and Son; Sonnets at Christmas; Winter Mask to the Memory of W. B. Yeats; The Traveller; The Wolves; The Subway; Last Days of Alice; The Cross; Shadow and Shade;* the sonnet beginning "Not power nor the casual hand of God"; *The Swimmers; The Buried Lake*. These are religious poems, powerful and impressive. They have, as Robert Lowell says, "a killing eloquence."

Allen Tate has been a sort of Matthew Arnold *de nos jours*: the anguished, intelligent witness. His career has been a search for order and traditional values: the Old Order of the South; Dante and Racine; formalism and the "symbolic imagination"; Roman Catholicism; Valéry's "Mediterranean" civilization. He has been beset by the loud laments of various disconsolate chimeras: the New Mood of the South; Poe and Hart Crane; romanticism and the "angelic imagination"; positivism; the "unexperienced future imagined by the late H. G. Wells or Mr. Henry Wallace." Tate has given to Catholic letters in America both measure and direction.

THE CLASSIC ROBERT FITZGERALD (born 1910) bridges the two generations, but has more

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affinity to a poet such as Tate than to such tormented converts of the Forties as Antoninus and Lowell. A "Roman" tone, an Horatian eschewal of the excessive, a discreet mastery of the lyric and elegiac modes—these qualities distinguish the art of Fitzgerald and make him (after his master Pound) perhaps the finest professional translator of the Twentieth Century. He is, in a sense, a less "engaged" poet than Lowell, but his work has a compensating philosophic breadth and calm. His earlier poetry, rather heavily indebted to Eliot and Pound, expressed a private mysticism of Art which had replaced him for the Church of his childhood, but following World War Two he returned to the Faith. Against Paul Blanshard, he stood forth uncompromisingly as a Catholic. More than any other American Catholic poet, Fitzgerald is the "lay theologian" who is deeply read in Gilson and Guardini and Maritain as well as in Saint Thomas Aquinas.

Fitzgerald's best early poetry is elegiac, like the desolated and Lorcan *Ecce Abstulistis Hominem De Hac Vita*, or the calmly meditative *Souls Lake* or *Colorado* or *Celestine*, or the perfectly poised *Portrait* of John Brooks Wheelwright. One of the finest of his recent poems is a *Meditation* at the sepulchre of Fra Angelico where his death mould is cut in stone: "The angelic brother, his starved lineaments/ Harshly chiselled in the cowl, his eyes/ Staring at fearful peace, his formal hands,/ Where the rude cape divides, chastened crosswise:/ Ancient and homely in the floor at Rome./ Here Pope and prior let the mortal tears come." Fitzgerald has a deeply sensitive feeling for Form: both the traditional form of English poetry and the "organic form" of the moderns. He is like some Silver Age Latin poet mysteriously transported among us: a passage such as this from *The Painter*, has, for all its impeccable *brio*, a kind of majestic sadness: "A lank hand had his master/ To shear through light like tin/ And bitter taste of plaster/ When jack boots shook Berlin;/ And wine clusters, Venetian,/ And Burgundy and France,/ Coral and carnelian/ Bled white under his glance." But the saddest of all his poems is the late *Solstitium Saeculare*, where, sitting on a wintry-sunny Roman terrace and having made his peace with Rome, he praises "Thomas who would teach/ Peace to the heart's rage."

It was precisely the heart's rage that the poets of the Lowell Generation sought to express.

V

THE POETS OF THE LOWELL GENERATION, born during the years of the First World War, came of age at the beginning of the Second World War. Their reaction to the War was violent and uncompromising: Robert Lowell and William Everson became conscientious objectors; Thomas Merton entered the Cistercian Order. Of the important Catholic poets of this generation, only Dunstan Thompson served in uniform; he recorded his profound disillusionment in a postwar travel book. The Lowell Generation is distinguished, above all else, by its embittered distrust of the secular State.

There are many roads to Rome, but that of William Everson has been especially strange. A Californian of Norwegian descent, he was born in Sacramento in 1912. Except for reading tours in the East and South, he has passed his entire life on the West Coast. He resides as a lay brother at the Dominican House of Studies in Oakland, works as a master printer on the Albertus Magnus Press, and writes in leisure hours the devotional poems collected in *The Crooked Lines of God* (1959) and *The Hazards of Holiness* (1962).

As a young man, a farmer-writer in the San Joaquin Valley, he was a disciple of Lawrence and Jeffers and the exponent of a kind of pastoral pantheism. His almost mystical view of the integrity of unspoliated Nature he was to see, in the retrospect of the War, as an essentially religious view. But during World War Two, when he stood forth courageously as a conscientious objector, he did not adhere to any specifically formulated religion: his was the non-doctrinal devotion of a basically religious temperament as responsive to Berdyaev or Kierkegaard as to St. Thomas Aquinas. His conversion occurred during the Christmas Season of 1948. Following a short period with a Catholic Worker group, he entered the Dominican Order in 1951, assuming the name Brother Antoninus.

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A selection of his pre-Catholic poems was published by New Directions in 1948 as *The Residual Years*. The "fashionable quarterly" reviewers neglected its contents and concentrated instead on the combative dust-jacket (written by Kenneth Rexroth) which lashed out at "academic circles where an emasculated and hallucinated imitation of John Donne is still considered chic." Yet, even in *The Residual Years*, his most Lawrencian work, he did not have the resemblance to Rexroth and Patchen that was claimed for him. In his Catholic work, Brother Antoninus has moved impressively toward a more central position: a tentative bridging of the chasm in our culture, where a writer like Henry James appears to stare imponderably across at a writer like Whitman.

Yet, Brother Antoninus belongs with the Whitmans; and an Age of Criticsm which has adulated Henry James (" *'I've made a discovery! Isn't it thrilling?/ He's as good as Stendhal,' cried Lionel Trilling./ With a rumble-de-bum and a pifka-pafka/ Came the fife-and-drum corps parading for Kafka.*") has tended to ignore the more expansive kind of American writer. The poems of Brother Antoninus challenge the claims of the prevailing climate of critical opinion. The excessively formalist reviewers, unable to account for their rude power, have been quick to label such poems "Dionysian" and, even, "formless." Yet they have a quality which can conquer the recalcitrant reader. Buttressed by moral theology and by depth psychology, Brother Antoninus' massive investigation of the Ecstasy and the Anguish of the life wholly given to God is of incalculable value to our age and to Catholic culture everywhere. You must read him *en masse*, as you read Whitman or Jeffers or Claudel, in an entranced condition, while the relentless periods move with a primitive and impressive music, while the interlaced lines of the bardic visionary crash and subside with the intolerable power of the sea.

John Frederick Nims was born into the Faith in 1913. A Notre Dame faculty member, he has taught in Spain and in Italy and has served as an editor of *Poetry* (Chicago). Deeply read in classical literature like his master MacNeice, he has followed MacNeice also in the cultivation of a bright, brash, "Modern" idiom which renders with precision the superficies of Suburbia. His two early collections, of which *The Iron Pastoral* (1947) is much the more unified, have an amoral quality indistinguishable from that of any clever American atheist follower of the middle Auden. Maritain, in fact, might object to an apparent collusion between the poet and his sordid material which is never, as it is in even the blackest abysses of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, related back to the central and universal insights of the Church. His translations of *The Poems of St. John of the Cross* (1959) hinted at a new depth and subtlety in Nims which was somewhat elusively manifested in his most recent volume of original verse, *Knowledge of the Evening* (1960). These are extremely skilful exercises, full of the literary man's graces and artifices and allusions: fêtes for the intellect performed with witty malaise. Yet, one feels still that the man is absent and only the stylist engaged. There is a new tenderness in the little elegy, *The Evergreen*; there is a new weight to the old idiom in *Decline and Fall* and *The Mirror*. But, bulking very large in the book are the baroque Italian epistles (*Roman Letter; Florence; Reflections in Venice*) addressed to the Fitzgeralds and the Tates and others. These handsomely mounted salesman's-samples far surpass the usual fountains-by-Fabergé type of Fulbright poem; they wander with happy irresolution over a sharply observed Italian scene, are modishly malicious enough here and there to recall Walpole or Beckford or Corvo, but they remain essentially the travel-notes of a Professor on tour. And Nims operates at a disadvantage, because the reader most likely to appreciate such poems will probably have read *The Aspern Papers* and *Death in Venice* and *The Gentleman From San Francisco*, and can only conclude that James and Mann and Bunin are poets in some essential sense denied to John Frederick Nims. The bad fairies who dropped into his bassinet their copies of Longinus and Lessing and the *Lexikon Rhetorikae* were evidently too overawed by him to tell him how difficult it is to write poems that are more than

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just glossy and glittering, that hold in their suffering gestures the ache of life known to less-favoured mortals; before they knew it, he had enrolled them in his baby course in Creative Writing, and they sat propped up before him, saucer-eyed and admiring disciples. But disciples have disadvantages: they give away your weakness to the world, while withholding it from you. Perhaps Professor Nims will have an unlucky and Lear-ish old age, and we will have better poems. As it is now, too many of his poems resemble that nightmare sewing-machine that Yeats dreamed Bernard Shaw to be.

THE STRANGEST FIGURE of the Lowell Generation, Dunstan Thompson won precocious fame as a poet and has lately amused himself with the writing of "the Catholic novel." Born in 1918 in New London, Connecticut, where his father was a Naval Captain and an authority on the submarine, Thompson is of an ancient Maryland family: one of his ancestors was a brother of Archbishop Carroll of Baltimore, the founder of the American hierarchy; his uncle, Edward Douglas White, was Chief Justice of the United States in the years 1910-1921. Educated here and abroad by the Jesuits and the Augustinians, Thompson was later a classmate of Robert Lowell's at Harvard. At the age of twenty-five, he unveiled a spectacular poetic talent reminiscent of George Barker but of stunning expertise. He excelled at the sustained, virtuoso handling of complex forms; in fact, the surfaces of his early poems were so dazzling that few reviewers complained of his failure to achieve a depth of meaning comparable to the technical brilliance. His first volume portrayed the emotions of a young man absorbed in the romantic friendships of college years and then caught up in the maelstrom of war and violence. (The Oxford section of *Brideshead Revisited* is relevant to the psychology of the poems of this period.) As an enlisted man, Thompson served four years with the American Army in Europe. *Lament For The Sleepwalker* (1947), his second volume, records the post-war disillusion of a young man forced to grow up too quickly. Sorrow and suffering—the death of his father, the death of friends in battle—have given his art a greater depth. He understands now how "God betrays no one," since "Not a diamond devil suspires/ In the baths of the ice of absence, but went there on fire with pride." He writes the elegiac sonnets for his father and the deeply beautiful *The Moment of the Rose*: "The end of love is that the heart is still/ As the rose no wind distresses, still as light/ On the unmoved grass, or as the humming bird/ Poised the pure moment by an act of will." His special insights into the psychology of love give Dunstan Thompson a unique place among the poets of his generation, most of whom were more preoccupied with "the social scene."

AFTER THE WAR, Thompson travelled for a time in Egypt and the Near East. He published a sprightly book of travels, *The Phoenix in the Desert* in 1951. The extravagance of the wit—"I sat next to the daughter of a man who owned the mortgages on all seven of Homer's birthplaces"—flickers among shrewd disquisitions on the Irish clergy, loving glimpses of Pacelli, and meditations on the saints. Looking at the ruins of Palmyra with the music of MacLeish ("*And deepens on Palmyra's street/ The wheel rut in the ruined stone*") sounding in his memory, he thinks: "The Church saved this city and this city is in ruins. Later it saved the tribal kingships of the barbarians, and the learned multi-coloured monarchies of the Middle Ages, and the overblown scented tyrannies of the Renaissance, and the coal-dust moneylands of the past leaden century, and now it is saving our own hysterical commonwealth of superstitious antique-collectors and mystical refrigerator-worshippers. And when we have done our time here, it will be saving our enemies, the people we are frightened of, the poor who are tired of high talk and no good will. There will be cardinals, such as Saint Jerome, appalled then, because, like us, they find an unknown society impossible to imagine, and suppose that the sack of cathedrals means the advent of Apocalypse. The Church came out of the East to the West and nothing that the East in imitation of the West can offer will ever prevail against that good news. The Church was

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here in Palmyra when the Scythians ruled in Russia and the Indians in America. The Church will be in Russia and America so long as it is needed. And that will be until the end of the world."

In 1954, Thompson issued a "Catholic novel," *The Dove With The Bough of Olive*, a bold American attempt to rival Greene and Waugh. Technically, it is an extremely accomplished novel about wealthy Catholics in London and Washington, with a bright Firbankian verve. Like so many other "Catholic novels" by Americans—*The Strange Children* of Caroline Gordon, *The Devil Rides Outside* of John Howard Griffin, *The Violent Bear It Away* of Flannery O'Connor—its technique is superior to its substance. Dunstan Thompson has published no volume of verse since 1947, and in his travel book he records his dissatisfaction with the dwindling audience of the modern poet, but the work of his twenties remains one of the highwater marks of the American Romantic Baroque.

Aside from these, the subsidiary talents of the Lowell Generation, there remains the problem of Robert Lowell himself.

VI

With the publication of *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946), it was clear that a great poet had arrived: Robert Lowell is recognized by academician and experimentalist as the major American poetic talent since the Twenties. Critics such as Blackmur and Bewley have severe reservations about his work, but such discriminating contemporaries as Jarrell and Berryman have yielded almost ecstatically to the whole Lowell *oeuvre*.

Lowell, rose, in effect, from the sarcophagus of a defunct Puritan theology to cry out as if the fervor of Melville moved in his veins. His early technique was based on the heavily weighted line of the Seventeenth Century poets—Milton, Crashaw, Donne—and on the explosively crowded line of Hart Crane. Lowell is indebted to Crane for his idosyncratic caesura (the radical Lowell caesura, coming with sledge-hammer effect between the ninth and tenth syllables of the line, appears to be patterned on Crane lines like "I learned to catch the trout's moon whisper; I" and "Wear me in crescents on their bellies. Slow") and to Milton for the abrupt metrical fluctuations (the famous 5-3-5 variations in *Lycidas* which also influenced Tate in his *Ode*.) There are in Lowell many direct echoes of Crane, several from Milton and Shakespeare, and assorted others from Vergil, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Housman, Auden, Thomas, etc. From Crane he remodeled or refashioned such lines as "Again and then again . . . the year is born," "The Lord survives the rainbow of His will," "To hear the postgirl sounding her French horn," "Remember riding, scotching with your spur/ That four-foot milk-snake in a juniper?," "The Chapel's sharp-shinned eagle shifts its hold/ On serpent-Time, the rainbow's epitaph"; from Shakespeare, "March, Time's fool,"

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"Black Mud, a name to conjure with," "I came to mourn you, not to praise the craft/ That netted you a million dollars," ". . . your hissing word/ As false as Cressid!"; from Milton, "Our fathers wrung their bread from stocks and stones," "Seamonsters, upward angel, downward fish," "Scorch the red dragon of my nerves to death"; from Rimbaud, ". . . the body cools/ And smiles as a sick child/ Who adds up figures"; from Villon, "The painted paradise of harps and lutes," "My human brothers who live after me"; from Housman, "Here the Lord/ Is Lucifer in harness: hand on sword,/ He watches me for Mother . . ."; from Auden, "Fear with its fingered stopwatch," "As through the trellis peers the sudden Bridegroom"; from Thomas, "Time and the grindstone and the knife of God." He has adapted or borrowed at length for such monologues as *Falling Asleep Over The Aeneid* (the dream about the dead Pallas is from Vergil, Book Eleven, lines 67-98) and *Mother Marie Therese* (from Baudelaire's *La servante au grand coeur*). And he has even adapted long passages in prose: from E. I. Watkin; Cobbett; Baron Thiebault; Thomas Mann (from *Tonio Kröger* for the opening of *The Exile's Return*); Thoreau (from *Cape Cod* for the first section of *The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket*). Curiously, these borrowings seem to increase his originality: he uses them with greater intelligence than Pound ever did; he is often, in fact, comparable to Eliot. (*Vide* the use of Edward FitzGerald, Lancelot Andrewes, Henry Adams, Joyce, Ben Jonson, Chapman, Middleton, etc. in *Gerontion*.)

ROBERT LOWELL WAS BORN IN 1917 in Boston into one of the patrician New England families which had for three hundred years furnished America with Protestant divines (Jonathan Edwards), financiers, poets (James Russell Lowell, Amy Lowell), scientists (Percival Lowell), military leaders, statesmen, and Presidents of Harvard. Like his father, Lowell is named for the first Robert Traill Spence Lowell (1816-1891), a brother of James Russell known to specialists in American literature as the author of that pale novel, *The New Priest in Conception Bay* (1858). During his youth, Lowell lived in Boston except for several periods in Washington and Philadelphia where his father was stationed as a naval officer. He went to St. Mark's (where Richard Eberhart was teaching), then on to Harvard for two years, summered with the Tates in Tennessee and finished at Kenyon in the Classics course (B.A., 1940) studying under John Crowe Ransom and the young Randall Jarrell. Peter Taylor, to whom he addresses a poem on the Feast of the Epiphany, was a fellow-student.

In the year of his graduation from Kenyon (1940), he became a Roman Catholic. His earliest poems are fuming, crabbed and cramped, kinesthetically "nervous," indebted rather obviously to Seventeenth Century metaphysicals; anti-military, anti-war, they adopt a denunciatory prophetic tone only to drop it for satirical thrusts in the manner of the Tate of the same period (Tate's *The Winter Sea* compares interestingly with Lowell's first volume), and then pass on to savage elegies for dead relations. They are the poems of a young man reacting against his family tradition (the Protestant Lowells had contributed officers to every American war since the Revolution), and it is not surprising that the man who wrote them should have found himself standing, in 1943, before a Federal Judge to receive a sentence of "a year and a day" (signifying a felony) for his refusal to serve the War effort: he contended (this was before Hiroshima) that the American saturation bombing of European civilians was immoral. Years later, in the "tranquillized Fifties," he was to speculate: "Ought I to regret my seedtime?/ I was a fire-breathing Catholic C. O.,/ and made my manic statement,/ telling off the state and president, and then/ sat waiting sentence in the bull pen/ beside a Negro boy with curlicues/ of marijuana in his hair."

WHILE HE WAS COMPLETING HIS SENTENCE (he served five months), his first slim volume, *Land of Unlikeness* (1944), was published by the Cummington Press. It bore a beautifully incisive preface by Tate, quickly sold out its two hundred and fifty copies, and received good notices from the reviewers: the meticulous Blackmur demurred, objecting that Lowell, as a Catholic poet, lacked the sweetness of Dante; but

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Randall Jarrell discerned the lineaments of a master. *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946), containing the best poems and passages of the first volume together with 32 new poems, won a rave review from Jarrell and recognition everywhere as the outstanding volume of the Forties. John Berryman declared Lowell to be "a master of the Catholic subject without peer since Hopkins." *The Mills of the Kavanaughs* (1951), manifesting Lowell's interest in the "dramatic narrative," consolidated his fame which now extended to Europe and was great enough to draw the wrath of Marius Bewley in a brilliantly destructive study of Lowell in *The Complex Fate* (1952). The minority opposition to Lowell is largely composed of: Bewley; Blackmur; Joseph Bennett; and perhaps Yvor Winters. And on the other hand: accolades from Eliot and Santayana and the Italian critics, from the academies and the *avant-garde;* a sense of being solidly established.

Then came *Life Studies*. It disappointed old admirers; it won some new admirers; it was generally respected for its naked confrontation of the problems of Lowell's past and present. Recalling Henley's *In Hospital* (1888) sequence, divided into four parts, of which the second was a psychologically penetrating and witty prose autobiographical fragment, *Life Studies* displayed a Lowell breaking with his own past, breaking with Roman Catholicism, and returning to the Protestant family fold. After the opening pages, even the old resonant meters are abandoned, and Lowell experiments with the new witty, direct, prosaic line formulated in their own poetry earlier by Jarrell and by Elizabeth Bishop. One is not surprised to find on the dust-jacket a "statement" by Miss Bishop: "This new book begins on Robert Lowell's now-familiar trumpet-notes (see *Inauguration Day*), then with the autobiographical group called *Life Studies* the tone changes. In these poems, heart-breaking, shocking, grotesque and gentle, the unhesitant attack, the imagery and construction, are as brilliant as ever, but the mood is nostalgic and the meter is refined." Miss Bishop does not reveal that the meter is sometimes refined to the vanishing point. For my taste, the trumpet-notes are considerably more compelling: *Lord Weary's Castle* is an incomparably superior book. Yet a poet has a right to change and move, to strip his style, to walk naked. Yeats did it superbly; Hart Crane tried it rather haphazardly in some of the Key West and Mexico poems (see Crane's *Island Quarry* or *A Postscript* or especially *Eternity*, which is so much in the late-Lowell style that I think that the author of *Life Studies* wrote it); John Brooks Wheelwright did it astringently on the New England scene in poems that are a foretaste of *Life Studies*.

LOWELL'S ADAPTATIONS DESERVE MENTION. They are fascinating revelations of his technique, and the best of them (such as *The Ghost* from Propertius, Book Four, Elegy Seven) are brilliant achievements; few of them, however, bear much resemblance to the originals. In 1956, apropos of Wilbur's failure with *Andromaque*, I remarked to one atrabilious critic that perhaps Lowell should tackle Racine, and he retorted that "getting Lowell to translate Racine would be like getting the Nibelungen." Readers of Lowell's *Phaedra* (1961) will know what this man meant. Anyone can say of it, like a Humpty Dumpty *redivivus*, "*C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas Racine.*" But let me say finally of Lowell and of his latest book of *Imitations* (1961) which emphasizes what *Life Studies* had suggested—that he intends to work in the future in a "loosened" form and has abandoned forever his old Crane-cum-Milton rhetorical sweep and heroic grand manner —that it is for the grand manner and for the great poems of *Lord Weary's Castle* that he will be remembered. In these poems, and in the best poems of the other American Catholic poets, there is a true achievement, there is what Allen Tate long ago discerned: "a memory of the spiritual dignity of man, now sacrificed to mere secularization and a craving for mechanical order."

HARRY STIEHL *has published poetry, fiction, and criticism in various journals in the United States and Mexico. His "baroque" poetry was the subject of a critical study in the April 29, 1961 issue of* America. *Mr. Stiehl was formerly Book Editor of the* San Francisco Bay Window, *and he has taught comparative literature at several Universities. He is the Editor of* RAMPARTS.

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EVERYMAN'S HISTORY OF LOVE

BY JAMES SCHEVILL

(A dark theatre. Music: rising to climax as a spotlight picks out a man coming through the audience. He walks onto the stage, hangs up his hat. A board, to the side of the stage, has a sign on it reading: THE RHETORIC OF LOVE.)

EVERYMAN *(To audience.)*
Ladies and gentlemen, I am your guide
To the history of love.
Everyman is my name from the anonymous people
Whom you see only in shadow.
Dressed in black with an unknown face,
I come from a world of hate to seek a world of love.
I follow a path twisted in time
Back through history.
You will see three concepts of love
And, first, The Rhetoric of Love.
(Points to sign.)
Alas, twenty centuries have created
Twenty million ways of doing things
And the art of verbal love has been forgotten.
Words are not important now,
But there was a time, the nineteenth century,
When rhetoric was love, when love
Was the poet's art of language;
Then the word wore ruffles and ribbons
And four to eight syllables instead of one or two.
Lovers searched for metaphors to flaunt their passion,
Vowels rippled in a shower of sound
And the chime of consonants was the highest art.
Imagine then a scene with the rich blood
Of Romanticism. Two lovers, a poet
And his admirer by correspondence,
Who love by courtesy of the mail,
Sit at their isolated tables writing
To each other the anguish of their hearts.
They cry, weep, and long for all
The rhetoric of love. And when they meet . . .

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SCENE ONE: THE RHETORIC OF LOVE

(The curtain is drawn to reveal two desks at stage right and left against a drop of ornate romantic symbols. Robert sits at stage left at his desk writing a letter; Elizabeth at stage right at her ruffled, feminine desk writing a letter. The spotlight isolates each one in turn.)

ROBERT *(He is elaborately, excessively dressed)*
My fairest soul, Elizabeth,
The red ink that sings your name on this white page,
Sings with the heat of my heart's dark blood.
Now that I am about to meet you
After these months of tormenting letters
I measure the lives I have spent
In visions of your sacred face and form.
(He counts:)
One life for your eyes: fair jewels
That outshine the pale, shattered stars.
One life for your hair: that mass of
Gold fragrant as the first honeydew of fall . . .
And fifty lives for all the rest!
Let me see if I have the critical words
Of the romantic vocabulary. Sacred, jewels,
Fragrant, honeydew . . . I still must include
Alabaster and heavenly . . .
(He writes fervently as the spotlight switches to Elizabeth)

ELIZABETH *(Writing)*
My Robert, the gentle footsteps of your spirit
Change the face of all the world.
They steal between me and the
Dreadful, outer brink of obvious death.
Our meeting is soon and will be forever.
I think of your soul as the Rock of Gibraltar
Above which fly your guardians, the singing angels . . .
(She smiles, pleased with herself)
Well chosen, a striking image!
(She writes again)
I dream of your noble face with beard
As sharp and pointed as a dagger . . .
(The spotlight switches back to Robert)

ROBERT
. . . of alabaster is the shine of your skin . . .
An inferior image, but at least it
Takes care of the word, alabaster.
Now let me see . . . your soft hand, a woman in itself,
Steals on its way of serpentining beauty . . .
Yes! Now, what next? . . .
When the last monk leaves his twilight garden,
Behold, Madonna! . . . No, that won't do.
I must be careful not to overpraise her . . .
(The spotlight switches back to Elizabeth)

ELIZABETH
The names of country, city,
Heaven, Hell, are change away,
For where you are or shall be,
Good strikes out Hell as possibility . . .
The rhythm is a little awkward, still . . .
You have raised aloft my sail of happiness
And I come to you, oh Gibraltar, on the tides of joy!
(Reflecting, with the pen in her mouth)
No, better strike out that second Gibraltar . . .
To use it twice would take the cutting edge
From the metaphor . . . It is almost time . . .
(She rises and paces about nervously)
What will he say when we meet?
Such words of glory as he writes?
He has made new wonders out of silly syllables.
(A second spotlight centers on Robert. He rises, preens himself as in a mirror, and paces about distractedly.)

ROBERT
It is time to meet her. She will be waiting,
Her face against the trumpet sun
In the first splendor of morning light.
When the hill-side's dew-pearled
The lark's on the wing
And the snail's resting on the thorn——
Now for the bee's kiss . . .
(He gives up scribbling while pacing, and throws away his literary efforts impatiently)
Oh, my blood and bones are on fire!
(They walk forward and meet. At first they pass each other imperiously and then stop and wait impatiently. After a moment, they look around, puzzled.)

ROBERT
Pardon me, I was expecting . . .
(Aside) Who is this woman? She has a muddy skin.

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ELIZABETH
Excuse me, Sir. I was waiting for . . .
(Aside) I'll let this silly stranger pass.
He struts like a mocking-bird!

ROBERT
(The terrible truth begins to penetrate his mind)
It cannot be. You are not Elizabeth
For whom I created a new language.

ELIZABETH *(Her illusion is also shattered)*
Yes, I am Elizabeth,
But you are not Robert.
(Aside) Robert is a well-dressed gentleman,
Not a gaudy tent of colors.

ROBERT *(Grudgingly)*
Robert is my given name . . .
(Aside) And Chimneysweep Liz is hers.

ELIZABETH *(Haughtily)*
This is a cold surprise for the warm name of Robert.
(Aside) He has the romance of a snake shedding its skin.
He's as squat as a spider.

ROBERT *(He overhears this last compliment)*
(Aside) The wasp calls me a spider!
(He breaks out indignantly:)
A spider, Madam, can at least spin webs,
But you can only sting!

ELIZABETH
If I sting it is from disappointment.

ROBERT
Madam, I assure you my regret is the greater.
(Aside) Her hair is more wire than honeydew.

ELIZABETH
I assure *you*, Sir, my regret is the deeper.
(Aside) His beard is more dirty mop than dagger.

ROBERT *(Angrily)*
Let us not keep each other with our regrets!
(Aside) What is that unpainted drape she wears for dress?

ELIZABETH *(Angrily)*
Your manners, Sir, are as vile as black tar.
To think I compared you to the Rock of Gibraltar
Beneath a sky of guardian angels.
(She is on the verge of a floodburst of tears)
I am happy to say I detest the Rock of Gibraltar!
I detest its obscene protusion into a peaceful sky!
(The last is spoken through her tears)

ROBERT *(Outraged)*
Enough, Madam! You have betrayed
The language of love by giving me
A false illusion of your person. I am leaving.

ELIZABETH *(Pulling herself together)*
I shall leave first, sir.
Goodbye to unclean words!
(She prepares to stalk out)

ROBERT *(With equally emphatic scorn)*
Goodbye forever, Madam!
(They stalk off in opposite directions and gradually come to a slow stop)

ROBERT *(To himself)*
Perhaps I was a trifle hasty.
Often there is a further reward
After the first shock of a face.
And what is the splendor of language
To the companionship of a woman?
(Although he would never say it out loud, he is beginning to admit to himself that he is not the most handsome of men)

ELIZABETH *(To herself)*
I should never have lost my temper so quickly.
After the continuous odor of tea
A man's form is a welcome change . . .

ROBERT *(He turns around, hesitantly)*
Elizabeth . . . Wait, please . . .

ELIZABETH
(Slowly and anxiously, she turns around)
You spoke my name?

ROBERT
I was too hasty in my surprise.

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ELIZABETH
Your fault was only doubled by my haste.
I am sorry if I seemed severe.

ROBERT *(He comes back to her)*
Can forgiveness ever lie in your eyes
Like the flash of birds after storm?
(Aside) It will take lightning to strike
Radiance into those eyes. Still . . .

ELIZABETH
I forgive you gladly.
(Aside) But I must get used to his toad-like
shape . . .
Are we then back to the language of love?

ROBERT
Yes, to the safety of rhetoric
Where a man can be a Gibraltar
And a woman a sacred jewel.

ELIZABETH
Will you love me forevermore
Within the happy confines of your
Lucid nouns and sparkling adjectives?

ROBERT
Forevermore into eternity.
I shall write your name
Into the history of lasting verse.
Take my humble language!

ELIZABETH
I take it gladly and will seek to
Sing its worthy vowels into mine.

ROBERT *(Taking her hand)*
Then clasp my hand.
Language is more lasting than the flesh
Which is always too thin or too thick.
So come, let's love with rhetoric!
(They go off slowly to stately, pompous music as the curtain closes)

EVERYMAN
(Comes forward again and speaks to the audience)
You see the peril of the language of love.
Think of having rhetorical babies!
However, I suppose there's no danger
Now the nineteenth century is past.
Today we merely beat the language
To its knees and mumble abstract words
Like "nice" and "cute" and the
Muted, mating call of "Hi, babe!"
At least in the nineteenth century
Love could be a red, red rose and
The heart danced with the daffodils.
Today it dances with a
"Bingo, Bango, Bongo, it's an Integrated
Congo!"
But now on our guided tour
Back along the intricate paths of love
We come to the seventeenth century when
Charles the Second, the "mutton-eating King,"
Was restored to the throne of England;
And the carefully trimmed garden or
"Nature methodized" ruled against the
Wild and passionate growths of nature.
From the homemaking and rhetoric of love
We turn now to the Jealousy of Love.
Our scene takes place in 1661,
A few years after the first woman actress
Appeared on the English stage.
In his office, weary from his player's passions,
Sits a celebrated actor and director,
Beset by the problems of replacing
Boy actors with boiling female temperaments.
To him comes a fresh, beginning actress
Intent on furthering a stage career.
And so begins our tale of jealousy reversed
With which the history of love is cursed.
(As he completes these words, he takes down the sign revealing another sign underneath reading: THE JEALOUSY OF LOVE)

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SCENE TWO: THE JEALOUSY OF LOVE

(Sir Thomas Bridewell, an actor-writer-producer-director combination of the 17th century, is seated at a desk in his office. Above him hangs a portrait of a famous boy actor in a Shakespearian, feminine role. The speeches in this scene must be delivered with exaggerated style to fit the artificial language.)

SIR THOMAS
(With a grandiose and weary manner)

Theatre! A realm of boards and nails on which
Nature is cracked into illusory shapes;
Where Fancy in its wild and foaming force
Tears at the human structure of time
And sings its own ambitious counterfeit . . .
Counterfeit! That's the mocking word!
There's the reason why boys improved on
Women in the leading feminine roles.
(He walks over to the portrait and regards it with affection)
Boys had no fleshly grip on reality.
They had no life within their wombs
And so were free to dream their roles.
(There is a subtle, feminine knock on the door. Before he can answer, the Actress bounces in.)

ACTRESS

Do I have the honor of intruding on Sir Thomas Bridewell?

SIR THOMAS

That is my name and title. What do you want?

ACTRESS *(Demurely)*

Only what every young actress seeks today,
A chance to act upon your master stage.

SIR THOMAS

(Aside) Another lazy feminine declamation . . .
I hear no more women actresses.
My feelings on this matter are well-known.
That time was superior when we saw
Young boys playing women's roles.

ACTRESS

You cannot mean that, Sir.
We women act better than young boys.

SIR THOMAS *(Decisively)*

You can never prove it to me.
Are you an actress of the signpost school
Who waves her arms thus and so?
(Demonstrating)

ACTRESS

No, Sir, I keep my woman's place in dignity . . .
(She demonstrates in a manner that is more sensual than dignified.)
I ask only a fair chance to show my talents.

SIR THOMAS *(Wearily)*

Go ahead then and be quick.
I am very busy . . .
(He ruffles some papers on his desk)
What will you play?

ACTRESS

The Monologue of Jealousy.

SIR THOMAS *(Bored)*

There must be a thousand such monologues.
They're a stupid convention of the day.
Jealousy's a passion died with Shakespeare.
Whose monologue will you read?

ACTRESS *(Coyly)*

It will appear in the speech.

SIR THOMAS *(Resigned)*

It seems I am confined to listen.
Begin when you will.
(He is seated at his desk, fiddling with his papers, as she begins. Gradually, during her speech, she forces him out of his chair, around the desk, and back into his seat.)

ACTRESS

What is this mock of jealousy that
Warps my brain in tangled thought?
It is my twisted woman's shape,
Conceit, excessive pride of place,
A prison for the heart's lost grace.
Oh, my soul shall never find escape!
I dwell within the roundabout of jealous spite
And sullen rages of demonic underworlds.
Through prisons of wrinkled thought and
Swamps of memory I dream of his love,
The love I lost through selfish quest
For wealth and dress and social fame . . .
And when I could not bring him love
He took his pride elsewhere, to another's arms,
And so began this timeless Hell where hate
Moves in the bleeding masks of love defiled!
How can I lose this bitter jealousy and
Ask a greater knowledge from my heart?
Oh, love is a gleam asleep in my own dark!
I must come down, pride must come down,
Ego must kneel, then from jealousy decay
Love shall rise into the arching sun of day!

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(After completing the grand tour of the desk, she has forced Sir Thomas back into his seat and is practically on top of him as she speaks the final lines. He gapes at her for a moment, clears his throat, but tries desperately to retain some control of the situation.)

SIR THOMAS
How did you learn *my* monologue?

ACTRESS
I have long been an admirer of your work.
(Aside) I have him now.
Was it spoken satisfactorily?

SIR THOMAS
It was adequate enough.
(Aside) She *is* beautiful and I could
Teach a table how to act . . .
Do you know my duo, "The Jealousy of Love"?

ACTRESS
I have long studied all your pieces.
(Aside) Thank heaven he is not more prolific!

SIR THOMAS *(Slowly)*
Then let us try the ending
Where the mad, tormented Lord
Discovers his wife asleep.

ACTRESS
I shall be proud to act with you.
(Aside)
He stole this scene from Shakespeare
But he has talent and must learn how
Boys cannot approach a woman's passion.

SIR THOMAS *(Intently)*
You lie on the bench as if asleep . . .
(She does so under his supervision)
I'll turn down the lamps . . .
(The lights go down except for two candles)
I enter and begin with the
Last words of my opening speech . . .
(He acts out his entrance.)
. . . How shall I kill her in the dark?
Such action would resemble the black ministers
Of Fate who guide my jealousy.
Oh dark, dark! When the light is
Out in the dark the naked soul
Must either glow in its own quiet peace
Or be extinguished. Hers is the light I see
While mine is dark! Look now . . . she wakes . . .

ACTRESS
Who's there? My Lord?

SIR THOMAS
Have you prayed tonight?

ACTRESS
I have prayed—and dreamed—
A strange dream in which the moon
Transformed itself into a sliver
Of wood over my sleeping heart.

SIR THOMAS *(Leaning over her)*
Perhaps this was a dream of guilt
Unreconciled to your natural grace . . .

ACTRESS
Why do you taunt me thus?

SIR THOMAS
Have you made the preparations of death?

ACTRESS
I have no fear of death.
The death that kills from jealousy
Kills only the jealous heart.
My soul is free and I have
Never given you suspicious cause.

SIR THOMAS
Ay, Madam, it is not you
But your Devil's body tormented men . . .

ACTRESS
I have no lover now but Jealousy.
Oh, kill me tomorrow if you will,
But wait for day to judge your unjust act.

SIR THOMAS
Wait for the sun's approval?
No, darkness is a kinder death
In which the moon will not reveal
Your cruel, faithless eyes . . .
(He begins to strangle her.)

ACTRESS *(Struggling)*
My Lord, my God, why do you kill your love?
(She screams and there is a struggle.
Candles are knocked over. Stage in darkness.)

ACTRESS *(After a moment)*
Was my acting clear enough?
The scene is over . . .
You don't need to lie on me anymore.

SIR THOMAS
You were . . . excellent.

ACTRESS
Do you admit that boys can
Never reach a woman's passion?
(The sound of a kiss is heard)

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SIR THOMAS
I am . . . persuaded.
ACTRESS
Then could we have a little light.
(The lights go up. Sir Thomas rises and tries to pull himself together. The Actress fixes her hair and preens herself.)
SIR THOMAS
Good, you are hired.
Report tomorrow evening for rehearsal.

ACTRESS *(Archly)*
For rehearsal?
SIR THOMAS
Yes, we will discuss your roles in privacy.

ACTRESS *(Carefully)*
My leading roles?
SIR THOMAS
Yes, your leading roles . . .
And with the consequence of leading roles.

ACTRESS *(Laughing)*
I do not know your meaning
When you speak of consequence.

SIR THOMAS
It will become clear to you
Tomorrow night at seven.
Do not keep me waiting.

ACTRESS
(Goes to him and gives him a flirtatious kiss)
Sir Thomas, I know you will
Teach me a great deal . . . about acting . . .
(She waves to him and runs off)

SIR THOMAS *(Staring moodily after her)*
The jealousy of love . . . I am struck down.
For her a word is like a gaudy hat or dress,
A color to conceal all her heart's desires.
She is too clever at this acting . . .
How can I tell? Perhaps she has no heart
And all her cunning is a cruel game.
Perhaps she goes now to another's arms!
Down, boy actors!
(He rips the portrait from the wall)
From this day women shall rule the stage.
How can I tell? The night is night
And I am older than my words of love.
How can I tell? Tomorrow night will tell.
Till then my jealousy must be my Hell!

EVERYMAN *(Comes forward as curtain closes.)*
That's enough of that scene!
So that is jealousy
The author intends a trap I suppose,
The customary trap of woman
Baited with the lure of leg and eye,
A trap of irony in which even the
Ironic actors of love are caught.
But I confess I am confused and
Question whether love can be explained.
What a dangerous thing this business
Between a man and a woman is!
Was there ever a time when the
Problems of love assumed a simpler,
Earthier shape? In the beginning?
Let us go back and see for ourselves,
Back to the beginning,
Back to Adam and Eve.
(He takes down the sign, revealing another sign reading: THE SIMPLICITY OF LOVE.)

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SCENE THREE: THE SIMPLICITY OF LOVE

(The sound of rain is heard continuously throughout this scene. Adam and Eve are seen just after their expulsion from the Garden.)

EVE

Where are we? Where are we going?

ADAM

On a journey.

EVE

I won't go a step further
Until you tell me where!

ADAM

It's no use expecting answers.
We're in the world now and the
World only asks questions.

EVE *(Startled by rustling movement.)*

What's that?

ADAM

It's only the snake.
He's an outcast as we are,
But he's acquired the name of snake
And you can see what a torture
That will be for him.

EVE

I hate names.
Why do we have to be
Branded with names?

ADAM

You ought to be
Happy enough with your name.
It means life
Whereas mine means
Only "made" or "produced."
I'm strictly an imitation
And an imitation of Heaven
Is much worse than an
Original piece of sinful earth.
(A flash of lightning)
I shouldn't have said that . . .

EVE

He can't punish us more
Than we have been punished.
(A rumble of thunder)

ADAM

Watch what you say!
How do you know what
Punishment there is in the world?
All we have known is Paradise.

EVE

That seems so long ago.

ADAM

It was yesterday if that's what you mean.
Come on, we're not meant to stay here.

EVE

We can't wander forever.
Can't you build a shelter?

ADAM

No, it depends on God.

EVE

Aren't we alone now?

ADAM

Alone? What do you call alone?
These spaces of isolation?
Snakes, deserts, mountains, oceans,
And worst of all the
Terrible vision of dreams?

EVE

I know *you* were never lonely.
What about your first wife, Lilith?
From all I've heard about her
She was more than a dream.

ADAM

She was a dream of beauty
That faded fast enough.

EVE

Do you hate me then?

ADAM

No, don't you see?
This is our condemnation,
To live in a damnable world of imagination
Where there is no peace,
Where visions chase across the mind
Like clouds withering in a wind.
Lilith was such a vision.
Come on. . . .

EVE

I'm staying here!
Sometimes I think it's you
Ate from the Tree of Knowledge
The way you spout on.

ADAM

I didn't have the courage.
All I did was sit and
Stare at the Four Rivers of Paradise

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And the Fountain of Eternal Life.
But we must live now in the world of opposites.
Paradise is a memory of the green past and
Heaven a hope of the future when at last
He may let us drown in the fountain of Eternal Life.
But the present must be a journey through the world of fear.
A world of white ghosts and black storms,
The world of simple opposites . . .

EVE *(Stubbornly)*

Then I absolutely refuse to travel further.
I'm staying right here! *(rumble of thunder)*
Hurry with the shelter!

ADAM

He doesn't want us to have a shelter.
I'm only a man and you should learn
That you're only a woman.

EVE

I have learned that.
After all I was made from your rib
And that wasn't exactly comfortable.
(Lightning)

ADAM

Don't be blasphemous!
God may hate you.

EVE *(Petulantly)*

He hates us already.
We must learn how to love.

ADAM

But we've done that.

EVE

In one night?
I think He means us to take eternity.

ADAM

I prefer the measurement of time
By a cool night and a warm day.

EVE

Isn't it too bad you couldn't
Choose Lilith? But don't worry.
In time there will be thousands of women.

ADAM

I didn't mean that.
I love you well enough.

EVE

Well enough is hardly the depth of passion.
Such an expression of love
Will not hold a woman in the future.

ADAM

What can the future mean to us,
An unknown way ruled by unknown hands,
Or the past, a history of sin,
Or the present, an age of fear
In which we remember with regret
The peace of Paradise . . .

EVE

I do not forget what He said:
"In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children."
But He also said:
"Thy desire shall be to thy husband."
Love has become the task of a woman
And the flaming sword stands guard
Over the ancient Garden where we met.
We cannot return, but I will take your despair,
Your Hell, and give it meaning.
From sweat of our bodies the bread
We eat shall be the reward of our hands;
For my eating from the Tree of Good and Evil
Was because I desired everything
And what is desired greatly
Must be had with suffering
That love may endure in the end.
(More lightning and thunder. They embrace. The curtain falls. Everyman comes out and picks up his hat.)

EVERYMAN

This is a deceptive ending.
You can never trust these actors.
As far as I can make out
Simplicity is not so simple after all.
It seems to be a question of endurance as well.
Love is composed of scepticism and
Passion and jealousy and language and
Even God plays a part in the simple act of love!
Love is and will remain a singing mystery
Where word sings only into body
And fades away into singing flesh.
I must go home to study these lessons . . .
But, alas, I have no wife.
If you know of a moderately respectable woman
At least half-beautiful
With fine legs and a good shape
And a temperament that plays
No hot tricks with the mercury,
Please let me know. In the meantime, good night.
(He puts on his hat and walks out.)

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A SYMPOSIUM
ON
TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

I
TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: The Playwright as Analysand
by Warren Coffey

II
NIGHT OF THE IGUANA: A New Tennessee Williams?
by Jacob H. Adler

III
MILDEW ON THE OLD MAGNOLIA
by Edward M. Keating

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TENNESSEE WILLIAMS:

"... if there is any truth in the Aristotelian idea that violence is purged by its poetic representation on a stage, then it may be that my cycle of violent plays have had a moral justification after all."

MARY McCARTHY:

"Like Blanche Du Bois in A Streetcar Named Desire *and the mother in* The Glass Menagerie, *he is addicted to the embroidering lie, and though his taste in fancywork differs from these ladies', inclining more to the modernistic . . . to clarinet music, suicide, homosexuality, rape, and insanity, his work creates in the end that very effect of painful falsity which is imparted to the Kowalski household by Blanche's pink lampshades and couch-covers. . . . If art, as Mr. Williams appears to believe, is a lie, then anything goes, but Mr. Williams' lies, like Blanche's, are so old and shopworn that the very truth upon which he rests them becomes garish and ugly, just as the Kowalskis' apartment becomes the more squalid for Blanche's attempts at decoration. His work reeks of literary ambition as the apartment reeks of cheap perfume; it is impossible to witness one of Mr. Williams' plays without being aware of the pervading smell of careerism."*

BROOKS ATKINSON:

"His insight into character is almost unbearably lucid. . . . Williams is a writer of superb grace and allusiveness, always catching the shape and sound of ideas rather than their literal meaning."

ERIC BENTLEY:

"Mr. Williams' problem is not lack of talent. It is, perhaps, an ambiguity of aim: he wants to kick the world in the pants and yet be the world's sweetheart, to combine the glories of martyrdom with the comforts of success. When I say that his problem is to take the initial capitals off Sincerity and Truth, I do not infer that this is easy—only that it is essential, if ever his talent is to find a full and pure expression."

JOHN GASSNER:

"When the recording angel writes, he will have Tennessee Williams to add to the good deeds America has piled up for herself in heaven as on earth."

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I

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: The Playwright as Analysand

by Warren Coffey

WARREN COFFEY *has published criticism in the scholarly journals and book reviews in* RAMPARTS *(of Evelyn Waugh in the May 1962 issue; of Christopher Isherwood in the September 1962 issue). A specialist in 18th Century literature, he has taught at several American Universities. He is presently writing a book on Wyndham Lewis.*

THE TEXT OF THIS MORNING'S MESSAGE is taken from Ludwig Wittgenstein: "Hang on to your brains." A fine text at most times, it is particularly apposite in discussing the work of Tennessee Williams. Brains have not been the long suit of that work. Williams is a feeler, you see. He feels things very strongly; he has said so frequently. It is a sterling heart altogether, his. And he is sure that the drama is all about feeling, which, were it true, would be convenient for him. But it happens not to be true. Consider a medical analogy. The drama can be diagnostician or healer or psychoanalyst. The one thing it cannot be is patient or psychoanalysand. And that is what we have with Williams, the dramatist as analysand. In his best written play, *Suddenly Last Summer*, a psychiatrist injects truth serum into the heroine, and we listen to her tortured revelations. And that is why we get the constant hysteria and violence and hatred of his plays, because in all of them we are watching dramatized symptoms, often highly private ones. Williams asks the audience to act as analyst in a kind of frenzied group therapy. We are supposed to chant non-directive "uh-huh's" in choral unison as we watch those splendid nymphomaniacs and perverts and hysteriacs and whores. And we are asked to grapple these personages to our hearts and embrace them damply and to applaud the suggestion that there is nothing else, that they are our image. That is very nearly the whole trick of it, the playwright as analysand. It is a highly defective approach to the drama.

Taxonomy, in the stark way of science, is often helpful in dispelling the literary vapors. Tennessee Williams is a writer of melodramas. It is an inferior form, the melodrama, but that is what he writes. It is carefully updated melodrama, for Williams is nothing if not modish. Thus, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* asks the old kind of question: "Will Brick inherit the plantation?" But it also asks, "Can Brick find fulfillment as a heterosexual?" There are the intense emotionality of the old melodrama and its violence and staginess too. And the same crude dividing up of characters, though Williams does it on a new principle: in his plays gonad imbalance or its psychic equivalent is the seal of the righteous; balance, the sign of the blackguard.

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Geography will throw some light on our subject too. Williams has flourished on Broadway. It is a plain mostly, and any eminence is likely to be deceptively mountainous simply because of the flatness of the surrounding terrain. For many years a serious play was defined there as one in which Helen Hayes appeared extensively. Only O'Neill, and he infrequently, rose above the surrounding flatness in any way likely to be permanent. There have been sand dunes with names like Maxwell Anderson—all that bleat, all that exceedingly blank verse. There have been most mountain-like noises from Arthur Miller, too. And down from a hillock named Archibald MacLeish has come the message that Yale men, at least, never will despair. But mostly Broadway is a plain and a silent one.

THEN THERE ARE the Broadway actors. The list of things they cannot do would be fairly extensive. It would include—confining ourselves to plays in English—medieval plays, Elizabethan and Jacobean plays, plays of the Restoration and 18th century, plays of the 19th century. Roughly, any play that requires the actor to speak verse, or more than four lines of prose at a burst, or to refrain from lighting cigarettes constantly. Made to refrain from lighting cigarettes, the Broadway actor becomes aware of his hands. If his costume lacks pockets, he may go into irreversible shock. There are some plays of the 20th century that Broadway actors can do, mostly the ones that do not count. They cannot do Shaw, Yeats, or Eliot, but they can do O'Neill, Miller, and Williams. These they can do extremely well: there is no denying that. But it is an extremely small range after all. There is a whole school of actors who can perform creditably in the Williams plays. That, says Eric Bentley, is the great advantage for Williams in being so thoroughly conventional. So knowing have these actors become, as a matter of fact, so quick to improve a hint that Williams has had occasionally to restrain them. In *Sweet Bird Of Youth* there is a prim little stage direction in which actors who play Boss Finley are enjoined from displaying "crudely conscious incestuous feeling" toward Heavenly Finley and directed to restrain themselves to "just . . . the natural" variety. It is often said that Williams' plays are fine "actor's plays," as though this were some particularly exalted form of praise. But English drama of the 18th and 19th centuries is full of fine "actor's plays" that are today never performed and hardly ever read. Williams' plays have also had the help of glossy Kazan direction and pseudo-poetic Mielziner lighting. But looked at on the cold page, the plays are pretty poor things.

One last burst of science, a look at the sociological make-up of the Williams audience. In fairness to Williams, it must be allowed that he did not bring it into being, but he has often catered for it. People with brains are not there because they are people with brains. The common man is not there because of ticket prices and because he has more brains than is usually allowed. It is a special audience, then, made up of five groups mainly. On the feminine side, there are the Wives of Dentists and the Mistresses of Hairdressers. Then there are the Remittance Men, who provide an easy transition to the males of the audience: Conventioneering Prophylactic Salesmen, each the high man in his territory, and The Man From The New York *Times*. Group One is here stalking culture. Williams is closer to the housewife than has been imagined. Groups Two and Three represent High Bohemia. They think of Williams as their man. He is a way of life. Group Four is here for a dirty show. They are the out-of-town commercial element for whom tickets are bought in blocks, and they are numerically a large element in any Broadway audience. Then there is the man from the New York *Times*. He represents metropolitan middle class orthodoxy. He is usually uncomfortable at a Williams play. He keeps wishing serious plays were what they used to be, ones with Helen Hayes in them. The dyads and triads came easily in those days. He could always write, "At once regal and lyrical, Miss Hayes' playing was a triumph of her art, a thing of beauty, a joy forever." That strain does not seem to fit the Williams plays or performers, yet the man from the New York *Times* has been assured at the office that Tennessee Williams is an artist and must be approached reverently. Besides,

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he has been told, psychology is discovering new things every day and Williams may be right. We must be tolerant of deviant views because not everybody has had our advantages. All of this sounds surrealist, I am aware, and I had promised to be scientific. But here is a recent pronouncement from Brooks Atkinson on the subject of Williams, and it will provide a check-point: "For there is always the possibility that he may be right—that everyone is corrupted by the act of being alive; that there is no escape from loneliness; that all human relationships are cannibalistic in the sense that we all use each other." In other words, no judgment is possible. Atkinson also writes: "Whether his images are attractive or odious, they cannot be denied, because Mr. Williams creates them vividly." This generalizes to: Whatever is vivid is true. At which point it is obviously absurd, for Attila the Hun seems to have had a vivid imagination, and Adolph Hitler certainly did, to go no further.

This, I am afraid, is as far as science can take us, and we will have to turn to literary criticism. But if we have been made skeptical about the inflated claims that are being made for Williams these days, it will be enough. When we see Brooks Atkinson write that Williams is "the most gifted theatre-writer in America," we will not be taken in. He may be that, but how far he is *gifted* and how far he is a *theatre-writer* remain other questions.

LET US LOOK FIRST OF ALL at Williams' non-dramatic work. This consists of a volume of poems, *In the Winter of Cities*; a novel, *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*; and two volumes of short stories, *One Arm* and *Hard Candy*. The poems are chiefly remarkable for sheer badness, but they do throw some light on the plays. There is a little of Hart Crane, a little of Edna St. Vincent Millay, and quite a lot of water. There are splendidly matey little items like "Carrousel Tune":

> *We are the gooks and geeks of creation;*
> *Believe-It-or-Not is the name of our star.*
> *Each of us here thinks the other is queer*
> *And no one's mistaken since all of us are.*

The lyrics here are sung to the music of the carousel. It is a ballad, you see, the great democratic-music-of-the-streets touch. In the Williams plays, the same lyrics are sung to banks of massed violins, the Mantovani touch. Then there is an extremely repellent little item called "The Interior of the Pocket." We watch a male whore standing on a corner, hand in pocket:

> *the hot white fingers unclose, they come*
> *unknotted and they extend*
> *slightly sidewise, to offer again their gesture of*
> *reassurance to that part of him, crestfallen,*
> *on which he depends*
> *for the dark room he longs to sleep in,*
> *the way small animals nudge one another*
> *at night,*
> *as though to whisper, We're close! There*
> *is still no danger!*

Notice the over-heated writing. Williams' work is full of "hot white fingers" and "hot mouths" and "sculptured thighs." Also, this curiously, of "tissue paper." The room here has to be *dark;* the whore has to *long* for it. It is the womb note often sounded in Williams' writing. Notice the sentimentality: the animals must be *small;* they must *whisper*, their sentences must end with exclamation points. Then there is the tin ear evident in such a line as "Over the rather surprisingly tenderly sculptured thigh." Those *ly's* would not get into even a moderately competent prose. Then there is Williams' boundless vulgarity: ". . . to the mouth/ The tongue of the beloved is holy bread." All these things—the false mateyness, the over-heated writing, the tin ear, the vulgarity of sentiment—appear in the plays too. But more important than any of these local failings is the attitude that produces them. And this is more clearly stated in poems like "The Siege" and "Orpheus Descending" than in any of the plays. Roughly, the attitude is this: that Williams' writing must well up from the dark unconscious and must not be submitted to the process of rational shaping. Also, it must not be the work of Orpheus the civilizer walking among men, but that of an Orpheus dismembered and in Hades. It is a variant of the Romantic formula. Instead of writing about

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what is to be seen in the Wordsworthian meadows though, Williams writes of what is to be seen in walking along the bottom of the river. We are supposed to admire the resoluteness of all this, but there is a lot of fakery in it. For one thing, the idea that the Williams plays well up from the mysterious depths of the unconscious is obviously false. They are the product of art all right, art of a low banausic order, but art nonetheless. Also, the assumption that mucking around in the unconscious will guarantee profound writing is fatuous. But it is a fashionable assumption just now, and with Williams it has hardened into doctrine.

THE WILLIAMS STORIES are probably not so bad as the poems. ("Who," Samuel Johnson asked, "will settle the point of precedence between a gnat and a flea?") The Williams novel is certainly worse. Let us look at that first for its bearing on the plays. *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* is the story of Karen Stone, famous actress. Her career on the stage is over as the novel begins, for she is getting old. It takes a long time to learn how old because the novel is full of Beautiful Prose: ". . . her nights were spent beneath the moon of pause." Also Karen Stone has "violet eyes." These do not occur in nature, but they are standard in Beautiful Prose. So are the "sculptured thighs" of the male whore she takes as lover when she goes to Rome. So are passages like this one: "After a moment's reflection Paolo nodded, barely visibly, and then he leaned all the way down with open lips; but already before he had completed that gesture, her arms and her head had risen as if the moon on the water had turned to a bird that sprang skyward. . . ." But despite her wealth and her once-great beauty, Karen Stone is treated insultingly by her hired lover. And at the end of the novel, we see her forced to take another, an even less promising youth who goes about the city exposing himself. What is the moral of it all? The moral is debased Freud. Karen Stone has ended unhappily because all her life she has been afraid of sex. She is a repressed Lesbian, and Williams is telling us that any form of sexual restraint is destructive. This is very far from what Freud thought, for he, as a rationalist, was in favor of quite a lot of sexual restraint. And he thought of homosexuality as a condition to be cured. Williams uses this debased version of Freud to give a liberated, scientific air to self-indulgence. Rather in the way salesmen stage seductions of unworldly typists. It is an extremely soft ethic, and it produces in all of Williams' plays characters best described in a Hemingway epithet, "messy."

The Williams short stories are only a little better than the novel. If the prose is slightly less yellow, the situations are often of the same cheap purple. In one respect, however, these stories have the advantage over any other part of his writing: they present the Williams world-view more explicitly and straight-forwardly than any of his other work. The stories often go lame, as a matter of fact, under their burden of message, and their author must stop to extend matey confidences to the reader. "Now from this point on," he will write, "the story takes a strange turn that may be highly disagreeable to some readers, if any still hoped that it was going to avoid the fantastic." Or he will write, "In the course of this story, and very soon now, it will be necessary to make some disclosures about Mr. Krupper of a nature too coarse to be dealt with very directly in a work of such brevity." Whenever Williams' writing becomes matey, it has something particularly nasty to reveal. It is the grin that comes before the overcoat is opened to show the postcards. After the passage just quoted, for instance, we read that a Williams hero who had seemed a respectable old man is really a hardened homosexual. Williams' clumsiness at narrative in these stories and in the novel indicates that his talent is not for narrative. The proof of this comes when we see the difference between a routine short story like "Portrait of a Girl in Glass" and that same story made into a moderately good Williams play, *The Glass Menagerie*. We have seen earlier that Williams is no poet. Whatever talent he has is for the drama.

IT IS A REAL but modest talent. No very large club is needed to beat it. As between Williams and Arthur Miller it is not quite Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Williams is better than Miller all right. But he is not so good as O'Neill. In roughly twenty years in the craft, Williams has

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produced just four plays that have any literary value at all: *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, and *Night of the Iguana*. All of these plays are flawed, however, and none of them can be called major except in the diminished sense that word has in American dramatic history. Clearly, if you are going to use the word *major* for dramatists like Claudel, Brecht, or Shaw, then *minor* is what you will have to use for Williams. The lack of anything like development in his work taken as a body is surely a sign of the lack of mastery of his craft or his material. In the ten years that followed *Streetcar Named Desire*, he produced *Summer and Smoke* (1948), a play in which the stage is awash with suds; then came the fake-hearty *Rose Tattoo* (1950) and the fake-portentous *Camino Real* (1953). *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), in some ways the most offensive of Williams' plays, was followed by *Baby Doll* (1956), the most fatuous and *Orpheus Descending* (1957), the most bathetic. And *Orpheus Descending* was a reworking of *Battle of Angels* which was a failure in 1940.

The real ancestor of Williams' art is Edgar Allen Poe; the best analog for it is the art of the carbuncular youths who score regularly in the millions on the pin-ball machines of the nation. You will remember Poe's *Philosophy of Composition:* the death of a beautiful woman is the most poetic of subjects; melancholy is the most poetic of tones; words like *nevermore* are exceedingly poetic. If you will play that in a jazz tempo, you will have Tennessee Williams. Alternatively, it is possible to think of Williams as Poe Squared (Poe^2). Then you will have seen the players of pin-ball machines. They are an intense lot. They grunt, they lunge. The bumpers light up, purple, yellow; bells ring. As the score mounts, pictures light up on the panel. Bathing Beauties stride across it, "giving promise of pneumatic bliss." The colors are garish, the figures badly drawn, all the emphasis on quantity crude. All this is in the Williams plays too.

Let us see how it works first of all in the inferior plays. Williams himself has owned to an incorrigible fondness for "cornpone melodrama." *Battle of Angels* (1940) is worst in this respect: it has woman characters who say things like, "I just drove home from New Awleuns fo' the Delta Planters' Cotillion," and when the last curtain drops we hear the darkies: "The religious chant from across the wide cotton fields now swells in exaltation. . . ." But plays as late as *Orpheus Descending* and *Sweet Bird of Youth* and as good as *Streetcar* are not without this cornpone. Then there is the Williams idea; there is just one of these. It is put most baldly by Val Xavier in *Battle of Angels*. Xavier is an exceedingly scabrous youth who is writing a novel. He says, "What's decent? . . . I never heard of that word. I've written a book full of words but I never used that one. Why? Because it's disgusting. Decent is something that's scared. . . ." This is the debased Williams version of Freud, and it is everywhere in his work. It is what Mrs. Metallious believes too. Then there are the Williams characters, the males a remittance man's dream of Adonis: Val Xavier, Brick Pollitt, Chance Wayne. They are supposed to be extremely vital. We are asked to believe that bosoms for miles around are set heaving when they come. But they are a vain and petty lot—Chance Wayne spends large quantities of time combing his hair to disguise the fact that it is thinning—and they have only the factitious maleness of the chorus boy. Then there are the inconsistencies of characterization of the sort revealed in this speech of Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof:* "Anyhow now!—we have tracked down the lie with which you're disgusted and which you are drinking to kill your disgust with, Brick. You been passing the buck. This disgust with mendacity is disgust with yourself." In sentences one and three, Big Daddy talks in the very accents of the MGM psychiatrist; in sentence two, in those of a field-hand. Then there are the Williams heroines. They are hysteriacs mostly or, better, a kind of sexual proletariat: Myra Torrance, Alma Winemiller, the Princess Kosmonopolis. They are the deprived proletarians who await their liberation by heroic proletarian studs. In most of the Williams plays, there is a "big" scene in which we are treated to their hysterics. Another of the constants in the Williams heroines is a kindly attitude to homosexuals. One variant from the type is

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Serafina Delle Rose. She is Williams' version of the Earth Mother, Gaia, Hertha. Because she is Italian and Williams patronizes Italians, her appetites are comic. When the same appetites occur in Southern Anglo-Saxon ladies, they are supposed to be tragic. Then there is the Youth Cult note in Williams' characterization. We are asked to believe that his characters beneath their vices and neuroses have retained the simplicity and innocence of children. Infallibly a seduction or an adultery is accompanied by stage directions which tell us that the partners are "sweetly grave as two children" or are like "two shy children" or that "They are like two children who have found life's meaning, simply and quietly, along a country road." It is the Peter Pan note. Then there are the failures of Williams' craft, the chronically yellow prose, for example: "All of us have a desperate bird in our hearts, a memory—some distant mother with—wings." The prose is often on the point of flowering into verse. Sometimes it does, as in this patch of anapests that grew along the *Camino Real*. I have provided the line divisions:

The fire's gone out of the day but the light of it lingers
In Rome the continual fountains are bathing stone heroes with silver,
In Copenhagen the Tivoli gardens are lighted,
They're selling the lottery on San Juan de Latrene. . . .

Then twenty-three pages into the script of *Baby Doll*, there is this little frenzy of exposition: "This is a mighty fine party you're throwing tonight to celebrate your first anniversary as superintendent of the Syndicate Plantation and Gin." Then there are the excesses of the imagination, the excess of roses, for example, in *The Rose Tattoo*. We have characters named Serafina and Rosa Delle Rose who spend a lot of time in a room with rose-patterned wallpaper and a rose-colored carpet. Three other characters, two male and one female, have roses tattooed on their chests. Serafina wears a rose-colored sheath and has a rose in her hair and waves a fan on which is painted a rose. She has a vision involving a rose which she takes to mean that a rose is going to grow under her great folk heart. Williams reminds you of what Proust observed of one of his characters, a lady watercolorist, "After God, she had created the most roses." Then there are the sentiments to make the wives of dentists weep, this one from *Camino Real:* "The violets in the mountains can break the rocks if you believe in them and allow them to grow!" Then there is the matey and undramatic ending of *Sweet Bird of Youth* in which Chance Wayne, the beach boy and male whore, comes forward to ask the audience to recognize itself in him. And the faulty planning of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* where Act Two ends with Brick and Big Daddy agreeing on how much they hate all forms of mendacity. But this high regard for the truth only lasts a little way into Act Three. In both versions of Act Three—one for the stage trade, one for the literary—Williams ends the play with Maggie's lie about being pregnant, a lie in which Brick co-operates and to which Williams gives his blessing. It is the "messy" Williams ethic. It would be possible to distinguish levels of achievement in these plays. *Battle of Angels*, for example, is horrendously bad, and *Rose Tattoo* does have some comic touches. But on the whole, these plays are as described, sub-literary.

Only four Williams plays escape that category; for three of these—*Glass Menagerie*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, and *Night of the Iguana*—it is a near thing. Only the fourth, *Streetcar Named Desire*, is home clear, and it is just a good minor play. In these four plays, the usual stridor of Williams' prose is somewhat abated, which gives the dialogue a chance to be heard and to do its work. Sometimes, notably in *Streetcar*, it is superior naturalistic dialogue. The control of the prose in these plays extends in some measure too to characterization and structure.

The Glass Menagerie has been greatly overpraised, however. It has one finely pathetic thing in it, the rendering of Laura's withdrawal from reality. Aside from this, it is just another Broadway play. For all the talk of Williams as the great poetic experimenter in the theater, much of it based on *Glass Menagerie*, is nonsense. He could seem poetic only to an audience that thinks what Arthur Miller writes is prose, an experimenter only to people who make this determina-

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tion by counting how many things he has done with electric lights. Williams' real tameness is demonstrated by the frequency with which he uses the situation of the domestic visit: the suitor's call in *Glass Menagerie*, the birthday visit in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and so forth. And his treatment of this limited situation is basically that of naturalism. His forays outside this domestic range have not been happy, as witness the fake-portentous political commentary on Spain and the Thirties in this play and the MGM Nazis in *Night of the Iguana*. Worse, one suspects that these political references are only there to get the automatic thousand points that such things assure on Broadway and in the New York *Times*. But there is an even worse failing in *Glass Menagerie*. I have referred earlier to Williams as a feeler. It is a term that Samuel Johnson used, who said he hated a feeler. The feeler is always thrusting his emotions at you. He thinks they are uniquely fine ones and become him especially well. He will often pay ethical debts in emotional currency The hero of *Glass Menagerie* is a notable example. He has abandoned a poor mother and a mad sister. Having carefully put several hundred miles between them and himself, he luxuriates in the tenderness of his sympathy for them. It is the indulgence of the emotional vulgarian, and Williams' work is surpassingly rich in it.

SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER is Williams' best written play. It is a spare exercise in the stylized one-act play, and it shows a sense of dramatic tact about the elements to be stylized that will surprise readers of his other plays. It is the most unfleshly piece of writing he has done. The sweating and copulating so prominent in his other work are here put into the background, a notable advance. Regrettably, not much else can be said for the play. The red-hot naturalistic sensations of the flesh are only replaced by the Gothic ones of the imagination. *Suddenly Last Summer* has been called a morality play, but this is a mistake for it has no moral. Sebastian Venable is not presented as a moral agent at all, only as a helpless sacrifice to a hideously cruel god. The terror of his end—he is eaten by street urchins turned cannibal — is Gothic rather than moral. Williams' play presents only the exotic terror of it, not Sebastian's responsibility for it. Stylized art like *Suddenly Last Summer* often reveals mercilessly the limitations of the artist. Even in this play, his most resolute attempt to break with naturalistic conventions, Williams finds it necessary to frame the main action with domestic scenes. The play also reveals his remarkable inceptitude with characters, something that in other plays is hidden under the naturalistic drapery. Catharine Holly is the most notable example. Her insistence on telling the truth about the manner of Sebastian's death, even at the possible cost of getting lobotomized for her pains, is surely admirable. But there are two grave inconsistencies in her characterization. At one point we are asked to believe that her seduction by a married gentleman of New Orleans, a seduction she does not much resist, is an experience traumatic enough to drive her mad. Yet she owns pleasurably to a prior acquaintance with the amatory mysteries of the French Quarter, and she subsequently experiences only mild distress in functioning as procuress for the homosexual Sebastian. In the strange logic that produces the Williams heroines, kindness to homosexuals counts for quite a lot.

With *Night of the Iguana* we are back to the straight Williams product, the naturalistic drama. The hero is an improbable black Irishman, T. Lawrence Shannon, an unfrocked Doctor of Divinity from Sewanee with a history of nervous breakdowns and a taste for seducing young girls in his charge. We meet him at a resort hotel in Mexico whither, having become a leader of tours, he has brought a party of women from a Texas Baptist college. The play opens with Shannon on the point of another breakdown and asks whether he will choose to calm himself with the alcohol and the body of Maxine Faulk, the slattern proprietress, or with the poppy-seed tea and the good advice of Hannah Jelkes, a spiritual type guest from New England. There are some Nazis who go around breaking into the Horst Wessel song, I am afraid, but we need not take them very seriously. The only remarkable thing in the play is the character of Hannah Jelkes. She has a cool head, an austere character, and a real feminine

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sensibility. She is one of the few Williams women who are not disguised male homosexuals, though even she is described as "androgynous-looking," and the play has to establish laboriously that she is kind to deviants. She has some calm and notably sensible things to say about the necessity of endurance and human decency. And she is acute enough to see that Shannon's histrionic neurosis is willed, that it is a pathic form of self-indulgence. She is a fine creation, but there is so much lust and hysteria around her that she cannot pull the play together. Shannon, who is supposed to do so, is such an improbable blend of the fey, the pathic, and the merely dirty—he has the fag's turn of phrase—as to make the question of his fate considerably less gripping than Williams has imagined.

A Streetcar Named Desire is Williams' offer at domestic tragedy. It is his best play, but it is not so good a domestic tragedy as, say, Lillo's *London Merchant*, the minor 18th century play which is the progenitor of the type. For one thing, Williams has little power of plotting. Often he has been able to conceal this by crowding his plays with melodramatic incident, but they lack plots. In *Streetcar,* Blanche Dubois goes to New Orleans to visit her sister. It is only a situation and the action must be super-added by making the characters clash. The point is an obvious one, but something can be said about what it implies for Williams' plays. Plotting is the work of the analytic brain and the shaping imagination. Where it is lacking you will get, as a general thing, bad kinetic art: in the drama, agitated scenes badly connected. And that is what you get with Williams: a series of highly emotional scenes, the poker game or the scene in which Blanche is packed off to the mental hospital. But the play as a whole has a diffuse time scheme and probability of action is sacrificed to produce the strong emotions. In *Streetcar*, there is this grave improbability, that Stella would refuse to believe Blanche's story of the rape and would have her committed. Williams hurries over this because he needs it to produce the melodramatic scene in which Blanche is taken away.

One would not wish to deny the pathos of Blanche, though. She has courage, and that has been rare in Williams characters. She also has a neglected kind of austerity, aesthetic austerity. She believes in doing things well, and we learn from Aquinas that virtue requires "not only that we do the right thing, but that we do the right thing well." But doing the right thing gives Blanche quite a lot of trouble, and we are constantly having to refer her actions to her sicknesses. And here there are several false notes. First of all, the sheer number of her neuroses: the hyperaesthesia, the compulsive lying, the alcoholism, the nymphomania. These in turn are to be referred to her traumatic early marriage to a homosexual. As an explanation, this simply does not wash. Even if it is accepted, it produces the further illogicality that the gentle homosexual has done as much to destroy Blanche as does the brutal rapist, Kowalski. And there is something faulty too in the logic that makes the mental hospital such a terrible end for a character that Williams has presented as being so spectacularly in need of medical attention. Kowalski, the villain, is right out of melodrama. Williams, who tries everything to palliate Blanche's sins, stops at almost nothing to blacken Kowalski's. He comes near, as a matter of literal fact, to staging the rape itself. The melodramatic handling of Kowalski and the loading up of Blanche with special neuroses and experiences rob the play of any terror. This pitch of brute male villainy, and this reach of sickness are out of the way of common experience. Williams can reach pathos, but terror, the sterner thing, is beyond him. And even in this, his best play, he writes obliquely of special experiences and perceptions rather than of the tragedy of the general human condition.

Of Williams' plays as a whole, then, most are sub-literary. Four are something more than Broadway plays. Only one of these has any real merit, and it too is flawed. Williams' approach to the drama, that of the playwright as analysand, is itself defective. In his plays we find the world view of a hairdresser and the art of an hysteriac. If he is, as he has been called, "the best theater-writer in America," that is more disparagement of American drama than eulogy of Williams.

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II

NIGHT OF THE IGUANA: A New Tennessee Williams?

by Jacob H. Adler

JACOB H. ADLER *has published many articles on the drama, American literature, and 18th Century literature (his original field) in various scholarly journals. His earlier study of Tennessee Williams and Lillian Hellman,* The Rose and the Fox, *was included in* SOUTH *(Doubleday Dolphin Books, 1961), a collection of essays on "modern Southern literature in its cultural setting." Dr. Adler is Associate Professor of English at the University of Kentucky.*

THE TURMOIL AROUND THE NAME of Tennessee Williams has become so great, and the variety of opinions so numerous and flavorful, that it has become more and more difficult to speak of the man's plays at all. Williams has been a paradox of tall proportions since *The Glass Menagerie* was so improbably successful eighteen years ago. With few exceptions, he has drawn audiences to his plays, like some immense and Gothic pied piper. The New York critics have usually approved, either mildly or enthusiastically. He has won the Pulitzer Prize twice, the Drama Critics' Circle Award four times. He is one of our best known writers abroad, and widely, if not, of course, unanimously respected.

Time magazine recently declared, in an article which seemed to me brilliant, that Williams is the greatest living playwright except Sean O'Casey. Yet some consider it a sad commentary on the American theater that we should have to discuss Tennessee Williams in earnest. They feel that *The Glass Menagerie* and *Streetcar Named Desire* sing a pleasant, if minor, melody, but consider almost everything Williams has done since, including *Night of the Iguana*, almost embarrassingly amateurish and puerile. One of the best known articles about Williams treats his plays as calculating commercial ventures, in which he has deliberately sought for more and more shocking material for the sake of making more and more money; and this opinion has numerous supporters. A host of sincere (and insincere) people have been shocked at Williams' subject matter and at his apparent view of life; and many quite unbiased people find him simply not to their taste. Critics have declared accusingly that he uses the same handful of types, and the same plot gambits, over and over again. Williams has talked far too much about his own work, and at times quite injudiciously, and this too has been used against him.

All these reactions, good and bad, are at least understandable. Less so, perhaps, is that reaction found in certain academic and intellectual circles: the lofty sneer. I once attended a meeting of scholars where a paper on Williams was read. It was read sarcastically, and the content was sarcastic. Especially the view that there is anything poetic in Williams was treated with scorn. The audience—a large one—responded certainly with laughter and apparently with assent. Now there are branches of the scholastic cognoscenti who regard modern drama as commercialized drivel anyhow. But this was presumably, by their very presence, an audience friendly to modern drama. It is true that Williams is easy to parody but so, goodness knows, is O'Neill. At their worst, shall we say, neither of them is very good. A catalog of their flaws could be drawn up with dispatch,

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and it would be neither brief nor minor. But for certain people, Williams' popularity and his usual surface lucidity are unquestionably against him. Faulkner uses similar Gothic subject matter, but then Faulkner is too difficult to be popular.

NOW I DON'T THINK WILLIAMS is as good as *Time* would make him, though I think *Time* did well to point out his place in the American (and not just the Southern) Gothic tradition. I don't think Williams merits the minor place some would give him, though I agree that two or three of his later plays are unsuccessful. I don't think one can blame him for courting commercial success. Shakespeare apparently did so too, and so did a host of lesser Jacobean dramatists who wrote Gothic-horror-filled plays which we are rightly supposed to admire. Samuel Johnson was as dangerous as usual to disagree with when he said that anyone who writes except for money is a fool. When Anthony Trollope revealed in his *Autobiography* the calculating way in which he wrote novels, the Victorian world was shocked, and Trollope's reputation plummeted; but the novels were not one whit better or worse than they were before. The critics who blame Williams for trying to be popularly successful would not enjoy being considered Victorian; but I can see little difference. In both cases, the pertinent question is being ignored: is the work good? After all, even the Greek dramatists wrote for prizes.

And I am not going to blame Williams for his subject matter—at least not *per se*. He may at times have tossed the shocks deliberately in, but that does not make them, *a priori*, bad. It may be a twentieth-century fault to deal too frequently and outspokenly with the seamier aspects of life, as it was a nineteenth-century fault to be too prudish. But the great works have grown out of both attitudes. The reaction to Ibsen's subject matter—such as venereal disease in *Ghosts*—was far sharper and far more general than it has been in the case of Williams, and nowadays we find Ibsen very mild medicine and widely approve of what he was trying to do. Important literary works of almost all ages contain material at least as shocking and explicit as any of Williams'. And finally I am reminded of an opinion of Flannery O'Connor's, recently summarized by Granville Hicks in the *Saturday Review*: "that in these times the most reliable path to reality, to the kind of reality that seems to her important, is by way of the grotesque. The grotesque, she puts it, is more real than the real, and what many people regard as the real seems to her more grotesque than any of the characters she has created." Perhaps, indeed, Williams uses shock effects and grotesquerie without adequate cause. But we are back at our original basic question: is the work good? Genuine art always justifies its subject matter.

I am not going to concern myself with what Williams has said about his work or his aims. He has said contradictory things, puzzling things, possibly illuminating things. But authors are often notoriously wrong about their own work. The most cogent case is probably Faulkner, who regard *Sanctuary* as a purely commercial shocker and pot-boiler, and whose opinion has been contradicted by a multitude of critics.

And finally, I am not going to blame Williams, in advance, for using similar types—the neurotic young girl, the more or less grotesque older woman—or similar gambits, such as the gentleman caller, over and over again. In Shakespeare, there appears again and again the beautiful, intelligent, witty, independent young girl—Portia, Beatrice, Rosalind, Viola, and so on; but Shakespeare, traditionally, is praised for differentiating between similar creations rather than blamed for the similarity. O'Neill is replete with recurring types, such as the domineering father and the prostitute-as-symbol; when, in *Ah, Wilderness!* we find a father who is not domineering and a prostitute who is merely a person, O'Neill has been blamed for lack of consistency!

What I should like to do is to examine *Night of the Iguana* to see what is good in it, dramatically, and what bad; to see what it says and whether it says it in valid artistic terms; to compare it with Williams' earlier work in story, technique, and idea; and, in a limited way, to place this play (and Williams' work generally) within dramatic tradition. *Iguana* is Williams' latest play, it has caused more stir than any since

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Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, and some critics, though by no means all, consider it Williams' best since *Streetcar*. So we have a play which is new, which is quite possibly good, and which the critics have not yet had time to analyze to pieces.

NIGHT OF THE IGUANA is not the mixture as before, but naturally it contains some of the old ingredients. (It grows out of an earlier one-act play and a very much earlier short story; Williams, like Faulkner, is prone to develop his materials that way, and to change them greatly in the process.) It takes place in a steamy, luxuriant tropical setting (*The Rose Tattoo; Suddenly, Last Summer*). Its opening gambit is the arrival of a "gentleman caller" (gentleman callers occur importantly in all Williams' full-length plays except *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*), and the "gentleman caller" has a shady history (*Summer and Smoke, Orpheus Descending, Sweet Bird of Youth*). The central female character is a spinster (*Glass Menagerie, Summer and Smoke*), a woman burdened with the past (*Streetcar, Summer and Smoke, Orpheus, Suddenly, Last Summer*, possibly others). The secondary female character is a partly unpleasant, partly likable woman with very strong sexual urges (*Streetcar* —Stella, not Blanche—*Rose Tattoo, Cat, Sweet Bird*). One of the events is a nervous breakdown (*Menagerie, Streetcar, Summer and Smoke, Cat, Rose Tattoo*, others). A woman pleads with a man to take her—indeed two women do (*Summer and Smoke, Cat, Rose Tattoo, Orpheus, Sweet Bird*, possibly others).

One recognizes, too, old techniques and old influences. Williams has been said to be indebted to many dramatists, including Isben, Strindberg, Chekhov, O'Neill, and Thornton Wilder. The debt to the first two is pervasive in modern drama, and in Williams' case occurs mainly in the frequent use of central female characters, the concentration upon psychology in depth, the use of expressionistic devices (from Strindberg, partially via O'Neill), and the explicit treatment of subjects previously unmentionable. Specific devices are borrowed from Wilder in *Menagerie* and *Summer and Smoke*. But the constant, recognizable debt—or at least resemblance—has always been to Chekhov and O'Neill; and it remains so in *Night of the Iguana*. I have elsewhere summarized the debt to Chekhov as "the combination of compassion and objectivity, the development by conflict of mood and temperament, the comedy-through-pathos . . . the treatment of the central symbol," and this description still applies. (And incidentally Williams' preoccupation with bird symbols—in *Orpheus Descending, Suddenly, Last Summer, Sweet Bird of Youth*, his novel the *Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*, and elsewhere—may well go back to Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* and Chekhov's *The Sea Gull*.) The affinity with O'Neill is in the study of neurotic characters, especially women, and in O'Neill's two special, and related, subjects: the search of man for something to belong to in a fragmented, disbelieving world; and the conflict between the physical and spiritual in modern man and in the modern world, the relationship between man and God. This last is not a subject that, offhand, one would associate with Williams. But as we shall see it is prominent in *Summer and Smoke* and *Camino Real*, at least implicit in *Suddenly, Last Summer*, and appears full bloom in *Night of the Iguana*.

Night of the Iguana opens with a man's arrival at a broken-down hotel in the jungle on a hill overlooking the west coast of Mexico. He is a guide named Shannon conducting a group of female college teachers on a bus tour. He has brought them here against their will, has violated the tour route again and again, and has seduced—or perhaps more properly, been seduced by—the youngest girl in the party. He has come here seeking refuge, because he is clearly on the verge of another in a series of nervous breakdowns, and the hotel proprietors are his friends. There is much comedy involving the leader of the teacher group (who finally succeeds in getting the guide fired) and the girl with whom the guide became involved. But comedy or not, the guide has clearly committed statutory rape, deeply injured a young girl's psyche, and ruined the vacation of a group of hard-working women who had scrimped and saved for it. If we are to forgive him at all, it must be on the basis that he is deeply neurotic.

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The proprietor of the hotel has very recently died. His wife, Maxine a blatantly sexual being without a shred of subtlety or refinement, would be delighted to have the guide replace her husband. But Shannon is attracted only to very young girls. Into the midst of these situations walks Hannah, a Nantucket spinster approaching middle age, and her "97-years-young" grandfather in a wheelchair. He was at one time a respected minor poet. They have been making their living for years by wandering over the globe, invading hotel dining rooms, where she, upon invitation, quick-sketches guests and where he, upon invitation, recites his poetry. She has had to learn to lie and bluff her way through a hostile world; but it is clear that she is basically honest, responsible, brave, and deeply fond of her frail, deaf, good-humored grandfather. They are penniless. Persuaded by Shannon (who is not cruel by intention), Maxine agrees reluctantly to keep them overnight. Indeed, she probably would have anyway. It is about to storm, and if one has the barest human decency one cannot turn away into the jungle wilderness, many miles from the nearest town, and near nightfall, a penniless 97-year-old man in a wheelchair.

But there are guests in the hotel who could do just that: a crowd of utterly vulgar, utterly callous, utterly sensual Germans—the year is 1940—who are having themselves a whale of a time on holiday. They troop on and off the stage at appropriate Chekhovian moments, and they have no more to do with the plot than the comic governess in *The Cherry Orchard*. By comparison with them, Maxine is a model of humanity, even though she thinks of them only as paying guests and is not even slightly concerned with their Nazidom.

THE CENTER OF THE PLAY is the series of dialogues between Hannah and Shannon. They are attracted to each other intellectually and spiritually, barely physically at all. We learn much. We learn that Shannon was an Episcopal minister who was locked out of his church for "fornication and heresy in the same week." He had seduced a young girl. The next Sunday, he had broken away from his prepared sermon and shouted at his congregation that their God was a senile delinquent not worthy of worship. He was in the midst of a breakdown. (Rather needless explanations are provided, involving his childhood.) Since, there have been repeated seductions, repeated breakdowns, repeated resolves to return to the church, repeatedly broken.

Hannah is not shocked. She tells us, indeed, that nothing human except cruelty can repel her. She is compassionate, but she can bear down wittily on self-pity and false values. She is a woman whose belief in God has grown slowly out of experience with a mankind in whom she sees God's image, a woman whose religion is based more upon a doctrine of works than a doctrine of faith. But it is a real and growing belief, requiring neither happiness nor security nor illusion to nurture it.

With sufficient prodding from Shannon, we learn of her past too, though it takes all of her courage to talk about it, and she does so only to help him. She has never been loved, romantically or sexually. In her dreadfully tawdry life, she too has been at the verge of a nervous breakdown—but she managed to draw back, out of sheer determination and sense of responsibility. There simply was no time for it! And on one occasion, out in a sampan in Malaya, she granted the request of a small pathetic Australian, for a piece of her underclothing; the Australian was a sufferer from sexual fetishism—and she is repelled by nothing human.

But Shannon tells her a dreadful story concerning what *Time* mercifully finds a word for—coprophagy—and she is repelled to the point of nausea. This, one might say, is his vision of life; and if so, no wonder he has nervous breakdowns and thinks of God as a senile delinquent. But it is not hers; she regains her serenity. When Shannon is fired and replaced, she saves him from suicide. He asks her to allow him to accompany her and her grandfather, but they both know it is impossible. Penniless and desperate, he will—with Hannah's tacit help and approval—remain with Maxine; and this is, in its way, a positive gesture—unlike suicide, unlike running away, unlike seducing young girls—because it is not what he wants to do (it makes him feel like a beast

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led to the slaughter) but it will be a kindness to a basically lonely and insecure woman who needs him.*

The old poet finally completes a poem that he has been trying to finish for years. It is a moment of triumph for him and his granddaughter. The poem itself is thematic. It says, in terms of an orange tree, that this is a world in which man, gloriously reaching out for heaven, inevitably falls back to earth; and that such a world is frightening and requires courage. The old man prays his thanks to God for letting him complete the poem—and dies. Hannah is left alone, calmly facing the hostile world.

The iguana? The iguana, a very large lizard, is as unnecessary to the *plot* as the Germans. (So in their respective plays are the glass menagerie and Chekhov's sea gull.) It has been caught by some Mexicans and tied under the porch. It will be force-fed to fatten it, and then killed and eaten with relish by the Mexicans and Maxine. (It tastes like chicken.) But the little boys will torture it—cut off its tail and burn out its eyes—before they kill it. Hannah persuades Shannon to release it. He does, and as he walks out finally, in Maxine's possession, he puts the iguana's rope around his own neck.

IS THIS A SUCCESSFUL PLAY? I have been describing it in a favorable tone of voice, but before I can really attempt an answer to that question, I must look back, for several purposes, at Williams' earlier work. Before *Night of the Iguana*, I would have said that Williams' plays fell with some overlapping into three categories: those in which he creates fallen characters and convinces us of their underlying nobility (*Menagerie*, *Streetcar*, *Summer and Smoke*, *Camino Real*, possibly *Rose Tattoo* and *Cat*); those in which he creates fallen characters, tries to convince us of their underlying nobility and fails (*Orpheus*, *Sweet Bird*); and those in which we are not requested to expend sympathy on anyone. Into this last category I would place *Baby Doll*, as clear, cold, nightmarish satire; and *Suddenly, Last Summer*, a Gothic symbolic structure as unreal, unsympathetic, and frightening as "The Masque of the Red Death."

But *Baby Doll* and *Suddenly, Last Summer* are not the only two of Williams' plays that are stylized, and one could also classify his plays before *Iguana* according to degree, kind, and success of stylization. *Menagerie* is a memory play, not things as they were, but as they are remembered. *Streetcar*, mainly naturalistic and plotted with exceptional firmness, uses expressionistic sound effects and transparent walls. *Summer and Smoke*, as I have explained in detail elsewhere, is a modern version of the medieval dialogue between body and soul, an overt allegory. *The Rose Tattoo* distorts the dressmaker's dummies, exaggerates the tropical noises and atmosphere, and seriously overdoes symbolism. The set of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is stylized to the point of symbol, and the story (especially before Kazan persuaded Williams to tamper with its third act) is told in a manner so unusual as to approach expressionism. *Camino Real* crosses the border into pure expressionism. And I think *Orpheus Descending* and *Sweet Bird of Youth* attempt stylization and fail.

Thus up to *Iguana*, the success of Williams' plays depended upon two primary points: (1) we must either sympathize with the more or less ignoble characters or not be asked to sympathize; (2) the stylization, that is the departure from realism, must work. In *Menagerie*, the requirements coalesce: it is largely through the stylized symbol of the glass menagerie, and the theatrical lighting effects, that we sympathize with Laura; largely through the scrim at the end which allows us to see Amanda without hearing her, that we can view her as a sort of eternal mother yearning over her child; largely through Tom's curtain speech, outside the memories, that we can sympathize with him. At the other extreme, in *Orpheus Descending*, I cannot, at the literal level, sympathize with a prudish libertine, like Val, or a woman as stupid as Lady; and I find the symbols of Orpheus, birds, confectionery, snakeskin jacket, and various aspects of the Passion, cold and dead. And in *Sweet Bird*, I can admire Alexandra Del Lago as a splendid theatrical creation—I don't believe in a woman who requires sniffs of oxygen, but I don't have to—but I am asked to sympathize with her more than I can.

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Between these extremes (the success of *Menagerie*, the failure of *Orpheus* and *Sweet Bird*, and the success of a different and probably lesser kind of *Baby Doll* and *Suddenly, Last Summer*) lie various fascinating combinations. In *Summer and Smoke*, for example, the play's success increases with decrease of stylization (as in the movie): audiences are quite prepared to sympathize with the faults of Alma and John, but audiences do not, by and large, like overt allegory. *Camino Real* is, as many critics have agreed, a fine expressionistic play, and it contains at least three likable, fallen characters; but American audiences rarely accept pure expressionism. *Cat* was, it seems, originally intended as the purely stylized product in which no sympathy was expected. But Williams created three lusty, determined, fighting, human beings, Big Daddy—a Falstaffian figure—Big Mama, and Maggie the Cat, filled with grotesque virtues, faults and fears, with whom it is impossible not to sympathize.

STREETCAR succeeds beautifully in its naturalism, its symbolism, its stylization, but *Streetcar*, as numerous critics have pointed out, presents two special problems: first, Williams, whatever may have been his intentions, makes many of us sympathize with Stanley. Yet Stanley deliberately destroys his sister-in-law's last hope and rapes her just after his wife has had a baby. He has not even the excuse of stupidity, since for all his brutality and animalism, he is said to be, and he is, the most intelligent of his crowd. It is true that Blanche rubs Stanley's nerves raw, that she is hurting his marriage, that one can hardly expect him to stand by and see his best friend marry a woman with Blanche's sordid past. (Stanley, Stella, and Blanche are as intolerable a threesome as that in Sartre's *No Exit*.) But all this is no excuse for rape. Nor can we excuse him on grounds of amorality—Stanley has a code; and Williams makes no attempt to excuse him on the grounds of neurosis or childhood trauma. The only shred of excuse there is for sympathy with Stanley is that he genuinely loves and needs Stella; and Blanche is a danger to that love and must be destroyed. This is not sentimental, any more than Chekhov is sentimental; it is simply naturalistic, as Chekhov is naturalistic. It probably reveals an ambivalent attitude on Williams' part as do others of his plays, but while this may be biographically interpreted it remains Chekhovian. In Chekhov again and again our sympathies are divided and we like and despise a character simultaneously—for example, the egregious Trigorin in *The Sea Gull*, who is morally worse than Stanley—because he is a victim of his own personality. Much more violent and outspoken than Chekhov, *Streetcar* is still a fine example of Chekhov's kind of naturalistic, impressionistic play.

And hence—the second problem—it is not a tragedy. It is surprising how many critics have worried this question, and have pointed out unnecessarily that retreat into insanity is not a tragic conclusion, or have tried to find ways to make it one. Why should it be? Williams is not, in this sense at least, in the Aristotelian tradition. There are women in Shakespeare whose deaths are not tragedies. Ophelia and Desdemona, like Blanche, have a certain amount of spunk, but cannot cope adequately with the world's evil; and Ophelia goes mad and dies and Desdemona is killed, both too passively to be tragic in their own right though they exist in tragic plays. Hedda Gabler's suicide is not tragedy either, nor Miss Julie's. So Blanche's insanity is not tragedy—nor should it be—for two reasons: tragedy implies action, and the retreat into insanity is passive; tragedy implies choice, and naturalism implies no choice. One may prefer tragedy; but in modern drama, one's preference is rarely satisfied.

ONE MAY ALSO CLASSIFY WILLIAMS' plays, before *Iguana*, according to presentation of sex. In Williams' full-length plays, promiscuity is never a virtue, but strong sexuality is, though some of the characters presented sympathetically lack the "virtue," and *vice versa*. There is even a romantic *mystique* about sex—the ecstatic glory of the perfect union—which reminds one of Hemingway and of course of D. H. Lawrence whose influence upon Williams has been discussed till it is threadbare. Thus Stanley and Stella, strongly sexed and in perfect physical union, are sane; Blanche, the promiscuous, goes insane. When John, the strongly sexed but

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promiscuous, sheds his promiscuity in *Summer and Smoke*, he comes out better than Alma who sheds her prudery and seems headed toward promiscuity. A part of Big Daddy's power is his strong sexuality; his son Brick's neuroticism includes impotence. Val in *Orpheus*, and Chance and Alexandra in *Sweet Bird*, look with horror on their own promiscuity, though the men are still proud of their prowess. This is another basic trouble with these two plays: we are supposed to admire these two magnetic and shirtless young men for their sexual athleticism, even while we agree in rejecting their promiscuity, and while for all Williams' efforts there is practically nothing else in them to admire—certainly not the *mystique* between Chance and Heavenly, which is repulsive. The *Rose Tattoo*, a good play in many ways, presents probably the worst confusion. Serafina's strong sexuality, since it is connected with the desire for children and is itself, as frequently in Williams, a sign of vitality, is presented favorably. But she is herself disillusioned about the *mystique* of the perfect union, in which she had had every reason to believe, since her dead husband turns out to have had a mistress. Yet a new sexual partner is essential to saving Serafina from severe neurosis—so a new partner is provided. And the end of the play finds her fifteen-year-old daughter going off with a boy (to marriage? we are not sure) with Serafina's approval, on the grounds of the *mystique* at its extreme: the "now-is-the-perfect-moment-and-if-it's-gone-it's-gone-forever" brand of romanticism.

At its worst, Williams' treatment of sex before *Iguana* is obvious, adolescent, overdone, and needlessly vulgar, though vulgarity is not always needless, in Williams any more than in Chaucer. At its best his treatment of sex declares in believable dramatic terms that promiscuity and prudery are alike signs of neurosis; that abnormal sexuality (homosexuality in *Streetcar*, *Cat*, and *Suddenly, Last Summer*) has evil effects; that strong sexual drive without promiscuity is a sign of vitality and health; and (apparently) that the *mystique*, or indeed any union involving love or even kindness, is a symbol for man's success in his ceaseless effort to destroy loneliness.

Indeed, it is clear in the plays prior to *Iguana* that there are four primary virtues in the Williams world: strong sexuality, properly directed (monogamy, if not necessarily marriage); vitality; sanity; and kindness. And the four are likely to be interrelated. The Gentleman Caller in *Menagerie* is unexpectedly kind and decently masculine, and through his kindness and masculinity could save Laura if he were not already engaged. It is the pathos of Amanda and Tom that they want to be kind to each other and can't. Blanche desperately needs kindness but is herself unthinkingly cruel. Alma's mother's insanity takes the form of cruelty to Alma. When Alma picks up the young salesman at the end of *Summer and Smoke* it is less an act of promiscuity than of kindness (and his behavior is kind as well) and a desire on both sides to obliterate loneliness. Big Daddy, for all his grossness about sex, is horrified at the memory of a five-year-old child used as a procurer. Mutual charity brings the dissolute Casanova and Marguerite together at the end of *Camino Real*. The horror of the worlds of *Baby Doll* and *Suddenly, Last Summer* is the unthinking cruelty of man and the universe. The cruelty of the political boss in *Sweet Bird* is underlined both by his promiscuity and by his failure to satisfy his mistress sexually.

TWO OTHER IMPORTANT QUALITIES receive sporadic attention in Williams before *Iguana*: faith and courage. (There are, of course, still others, such as honor in *Camino Real*, and Williams' frequent concern with the artistic and cultural instinct and with guilt and retribution.) Amanda has great courage, and she is a religious person, though her courage may be expressed through soliciting subscriptions to a superromantic magazine and her faith through annoying clichés. The pathos of Big Daddy is that he is a basically decent and courageous person whose faith is almost entirely in money and sex. Lack of courage may mean neurosis (Blanche, Alma, Brick) or the cruelty of the bully (the husband in *Baby Doll*). Recovery from neurosis means restoration of courage (Alma, Serafina), though in both these cases, oddly, it also means loss of faith. Courage without faith may be partially ad-

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mirable (John in *Summer and Smoke*, Big Daddy, Maggie the Cat); but faith without courage is at best only pathetic (Alma). The young couple in *Rose Tattoo* are supposed to have both qualities, but that is another of the flaws in that play's conclusion: their virtues are sentimentalized and hence unbelievable. Brute strength is not courage (Stanley), and lack of neurosis is proof of neither courage nor faith (Stanley, Stella). Ministers—oddly, considering Williams' affection for his ministerial grandfather—do not come out very well: Alma's father is timid and uncharitable; the priest in *Rose Tattoo* is ineffectual; the minister in *Cat* is a greedy fool.

But the three plays before *Iguana* which particularly concern faith (besides possibly the egregious *Orpheus Descending*) are *Summer and Smoke*, *Camino Real*, and *Suddenly, Last Summer*. *Summer and Smoke* is filled with religious symbolism: Alma's characteristic gesture is the "communion" gesture, she and John once make a tableau of a "stone Pietá," the fountain named Eternity has religious implications, and Eternity lurks over the play. As I have said, the play is a modern version of the medieval dialogue between body and soul. But the medieval purpose was to show the soul victorious; Williams' is apparently the Greek idea that body and soul must achieve integration. It is probably significant that the houses in which Alma (soul) and John (body) live are Gothic (i.e., medieval), whereas the statue of Eternity is Greek.

Interpretation of an expressionistic play is always unsafe, but the imaginary trapped world of *Camino Real* seems to be a world of those who have lost faith and courage—who have lost the royal in the real. Self-pity, sloth, cowardice, greed, guilt, and sensuality hold people in this terrible world. The only ways out are through the Arch which leads to the dangerous Unknown and requires courage and either recovery of purpose (Kilroy) or idealism (Don Quixote), both of which are forms of faith; or through genuine love (in at least partially a religious sense), which restores fertility to a barren world: when Casanova and Marguerite sacrifice pride, greed, and sensuality for love, Don Quixote cries, "The violets in the mountains have broken the rocks." And *Camino Real*, like *Summer and Smoke*, is filled with religious symbolism. Finally, *Suddenly, Last Summer* records a horrible world of no faith except in money and science, of no love, of sterility amidst luxuriance, where the only God is that of Gloucester in *Lear* who kills men for sport, and the only courage is the neurotic courage of desperation.

WE HAVE TOURED A LONG WAY from *Night of the Iguana*, but it was a necessary tour. I have classified Williams' earlier plays according to sympathy with the fallen, according to degree, kind, and success of stylization, and according to treatment of sex. *Night of the Iguana* fits into none of the earlier classifications. Here there is almost no stylization at all, but the most straightforward realism, even to real rain falling through real gaps in a real roof. Here, for the first time, is a central character who has *not* fallen, who is neither neurotic nor depraved, but who retains the virtues of vitality, sanity, kindness, faith, and courage, and who has resolved the problem of sex through virginity without prudery, intolerance, or psychological instability. One of the central questions in judging the play is, of course, whether this character is credible as a real person in a real world, to be accepted as she stands. Personally, I find her utterly convincing, both in reading the play and in performance. Some people will not, and for them no other virtue in the play can prevent it from being a bad one. Some people will say, as they have said again and again, that Williams has been overwhelmingly and undeservingly fortunate in his actress. Certainly Margaret Leighton is magnificent in the role, just as Geraldine Page, Maurine Stapleton, Barbara Bel Geddes, Laurette Taylor, and a host of others have been magnificent in Williams' roles before her. But surely—as I am not the first to point out—to give all the credit to the actress is to put the cart before the horse. Shakespeare, Racine, Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, O'Neill: all created stunning female characters whom actresses are naturally eager to portray. Great actresses would not be attracted to Williams again and again if his roles were not worthy of their talents. Nor can a great actress, or a great

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role, make a good play out of a bad one. Geraldine Page is a fine actress, and the character she played in *Sweet Bird of Youth* is a memorable Williams creation; but the play remains a bad play, and it is unlikely to survive merely as a vehicle for star actresses. Portia, Phedre, Hedda Gabler, Miss Julie, Amanda, Blanche are fine parts *in superior plays*. Any actress worth her salt knows the difference.

At any rate, for me, Hannah in *Iguana* is another convincing, memorable creation. She is not a paragon of virtue; she uses deceit and bluff when she must. She is not a paragon of stability; it is desperately hard for her to talk about herself. Her security has always been, and will always be, teetering on the very verge of insecurity; but it will never topple over the brink, because she knows the depths of man's depravity, and she is still capable of love and of vital action. It is interesting, too, that she is the very opposite of Blanche. Blanche's neurosis grows out of her ties with a past which she both loves and hates, out of her poverty, out of her encounter with sexual aberration. She has been utterly promiscuous. She has admirable ideals she cannot live up to. She is horrified by vulgarity. She complains bitterly to Stella about having had to take care of elderly relations. Hannah is tied very literally to the past, she is penniless, she has encountered sexual aberration, she is burdened with an elderly relation—but she is sane, virginal, kind; she believes in something and tries to live by it; she takes vulgarity in her stride. For what it is worth, also, Blanche is of all Williams' dramatic heroines the one most closely tied to the South, and Hannah is the only one who is not in any sense a Southerner.

BUT THERE ARE OTHER NEW DEVELOPMENTS in *Night of the Iguana*. The gentleman caller, Shannon, is not the Marlon Brando-Paul Newman type to be found in *Streetcar*, *Orpheus*, and *Sweet Bird*. His sexual attraction is not obvious, and he keeps his shirt on. He is a minister, and worse in the beginning than any of Williams' earlier ministers. But unlike them he has potential for improvement, for he is intelligent; the play shows him turning from cruelty to kindness; and perhaps eventually he will find what he can at least be praised for seeking: a God who is *not* a senile delinquent.**

In *Iguana* the crescendo of shocking subject matter, rising in most of the plays from *Streetcar* on, is reduced to diminuendo. True, there are the stories Hannah and Shannon tell each other; but the stories are justified by theme and character, lacking the gratuitousness of, for example, the castration in *Sweet Bird of Youth;* and besides they are hardly the sort of shocks that would add to the play's popularity. Nor do they loom anywhere near so large in the play as the rape does in *Streetcar* or the cannibalism in *Suddenly, Last Summer*.

Violence is much diminished too. Only the struggle to take the bus key away from Shannon and to bind him in the hammock to prevent his suicide is overtly violent.

Also, while a recurrent fault of Williams is to be overinsistent on symbols, here at any rate—as was not true in most of the later plays—the symbol works. The iguana sums up the contrasts of kindness and cruelty, of freedom and possession, in the play, and it is grotesque, as the scene and the night and the concatenations of character are grotesque.

Even the Germans are essential thematically. More than in any of his earlier plays, Williams explores in *Iguana* the whole gamut of guilt and responsibility. And his play tells us that only the utterly guileless (a 97-year-old man who creates a fine poem, thanks God for it, and dies) or the utterly callous (the Germans) can be happy. The rest of us must carry our burdens.

In many ways, then, *Iguana* is a new departure. (I have ignored *Period of Adjustment*, which is also a new departure, but in a comparatively trivial direction.) *Iguana* creates several living, breathing characters, one or two of whom are new types in the Williams gallery; it develops and integrates a theme; it makes effective use of setting and symbol. But it has its faults: it may lack sufficient substance for its length, though (as in Chekhov) there is more action, more suspense, more comedy, more pathos, and more meaning than one would at first suppose. It gives an impression of less incisive organization than

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(in their several ways) *Menagerie* or *Streetcar* or *Cat*. The grandfather and the Germans tremble on the respective brinks of absurdity and incredibility, and for some audiences they doubtless fall over. The ending of the play seems a little bit pat.

NEVERTHELESS, I should say that before *Iguana*, Williams had created four major dramatic and literary works: *Menagerie*, *Streetcar*, *Cat*, and *Camino Real;* and that *Iguana*, more flawed, perhaps, than the others, makes a fifth. Williams' world of grotesque violence is one he shares with Faulkner and others of the Southern literary renaissance. In Faulkner, the view seems at times pessimistic because his penetration is deep and his ethical standard high; and (without attempting the ungracious task of ranking the two writers) much the same can, I think, be said of Williams. But when Faulkner said in his Nobel acceptance speech that he expects mankind not only to survive but to prevail, the corpus of his literary accomplishment could be seen to justify his faith. Those critics who have objected to Williams on the ground that his work lacks affirmation are, I think, moving out of the sphere of literary criticism by denying the right of an author to reflect life as he sees it, and they are refusing to see that Williams reflects a vast amount of current life in an insecure, relativistic world. But if survival—short of atomic holocaust— is affirmation, then Williams offers many affirmative characters, from Amanda to Stanley to Big Daddy and Maggie the Cat to the Italians in *Rose Tattoo* and *Baby Doll*. On the other hand, except for the unreal Don Quixote and Kilroy in *Camino Real*, there is only Hannah to suggest that man will prevail. Sharing the determination of Maggie and the final courage of Alma, only Hannah displays absolute values retained in a relative world; only Hannah wins out over her own personality, and hence banishes the power of naturalism. In Chekhov too there is occasionally such a character, and Hannah is a lineal descendant of Nina in *The Sea Gull* and particularly of Sonia in *Uncle Vanya*. "*We shall live, Uncle Vanya,*" Sonia says.

"*We'll live through a long, long line of days, endless evenings; we'll bear patiently the trials fate sends us; we'll work for others now and in our old age without ever knowing any rest, and when our hour comes, we'll die humbly and there beside the coffin we'll say that we suffered, that we cried, that we felt bitter, and God will take pity on us, and you and I, Uncle, darling Uncle, shall see life bright, beautiful, fine, we shall be happy and will look back tenderly with a smile on these misfortunes we have now—and we shall rest. I have faith, I believe warmly, passionately . . . we shall rest!*"

Chekhov was no sweetness-and-light writer, and one would not want Williams to become one. But *Night of the Iguana*, imperfect as it is, represents a new vision and a new promise.

NOTES

*As evidenced by his attitude throughout the play, by his parallel with the iguana (also "at the end of its rope"), by his speech upon releasing the iguana—he did it "so that one of God's creatures could run home safe and free"—and, in the play as performed on Broadway, by his wearing the iguana's rope, as described below. In the version published by New Directions, which differs in several respects in the closing speeches from both the Broadway version and that published in *Esquire*, Shannon "chuckles happily" as he walks out with Maxine. This seems to me inconsistent with all that has gone before, unless it can be taken as (1) drunkenness, or (2) a return from masochism to normal acceptance of life, brought about by Hannah's kindness and the insight she has helped him to attain.

**Moreover, Shannon differs materially from the heroes of *Orpheus*, *Suddenly*, *Last Summer*, and *Sweet Bird*, in a sense highly important to the meaning of *Iguana*. The heroes of all three of the earlier plays suffer retribution for guilt: death by blowtorch; cannibalism; and castration. For various more or less credible reasons, including the fact that they make little effort to avoid their doom and that the doom occurs at the Easter season, the heroes of *Orpheus* and *Sweet Bird* have been regarded by some critics as Christ figures. (Probably Williams was influenced by Faulkner's *Light in August*, where an even more unlovely character displays more satisfactorily ironic parallels with Christ, and is both killed and castrated.) But it is much easier to regard the attitudes of Val and Chance as masochistic and negativistic than to accept any parallels with the Passion, whatever may have been Williams' intention. At any rate, in *Iguana*, the parallel with the Passion is specifically brought up and specifically repudiated. When Shannon is bound in the hammock to prevent his suicide, Hannah remarks that he enjoys his own panic and pain—that is, that he masochistically enjoys at least a limited amount of suffering as a release from guilt feelings, that his "Passion-Play performance" is "self-indulgence." And she asks him: "*Who wouldn't like to suffer and atone for the sins of himself and the world if it could be done in a hammock with ropes instead of nails, on a hill that's so much lovelier than Golgotha . . . ? There's something almost voluptuous in the way that you twist and groan in that hammock; no nails, no blood, no death. Isn't that a comparatively comfortable, almost voluptuous, kind of crucifixion . . . ?*" And very soon afterward, he frees himself from the ropes. In point of fact, the deaths and the castration in the three earlier plays benefit no one and hence have no real parallel with the Crucifixion; they are negative, as Shannon's suicide would be negative. But at the end of *Iguana*, Shannon lives on, as a man and a sexual being, with a degree of new insight and with his potential for good still, at the very least, potential.

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III

MILDEW ON THE OLD MAGNOLIA

by Edward M. Keating

EDWARD M. KEATING *is the Editor-in-Chief of* RAMPARTS.

THE THEATRE HAS NEVER been embarrassed by an overabundance of writing talent. Survival of the art has depended in large part on the pedestrian efforts of minor playwrights who come and go with the seasons. These men keep the theatres open and the actors employed, but these are not the men for whom the theatre was designed. They are merely caretakers, dusting the furniture, weeding the garden, in hopeful anticipation of the master's arrival.

In the second half of the last century, Europe's theatre seemed destined to fall into disuse. But then Ibsen came along and set things going again. He aroused a great deal of controversy over his subject matter, and disconcerted the critics who still revered the "well made" play with its graduated intrigue and obvious plotting. Ibsen produced a revolution in the theatre, which revolution, in turn, produced an amazing number of great playwrights: Strindberg, Hauptmann, Chekhov, Gorky, Synge, W. B. Yeats, O'Casey, Shaw, and scores of second echelon writers, exalted, but far below these masters.

These men were daring, whether it was in technique or content. Once liberated by the example of Ibsen, they set the stage afire with explosive ideas. Of course, they lived in extraordinary times. A revolution, of the drawing room variety, was taking place, largely as a result of the emerging philosophy of materialism. Man had to be given a new nature to replace the traditional one that had seemed healthy enough until science proved that it was quite sick. The status of women was undergoing great, though not necessarily progressive, changes. Psychological concepts were creeping into plays as well as into polite conversation. Marriage and morals were being re-evaluated, with bourgeois practices getting much the worst of it. Man was upset and let everyone know about it.

Europe's masters were up to the task and produced revolutionary theatre to match the social revolution that embroiled the whole continent.

When America had its turn at revolution, in the thirties, the revolution was ingloriously let down by its corps of playwrights. 1929 ended the frivolity of the twenties; the country was in trouble and a revolution was about to take place. Whereas the earlier European revolution centered around the individual, the new American revolution concerned society as a whole. In its philosophical explorations, the European theatre tried to fit the "new man," essentially a materialistic creature who somehow still possessed a free spirit, into the old society, thus producing tremendous conflict, and also producing energetic theatre.

AMERICA TOOK this "new man," and in its own revolution, tried to get him out of the old conventional society with its antiquated values, and into something new that would wear better. But like most revolutions that haven't been thought out, particularly in the minds of enthusiastic, but non-philosophical playwrights, its energies were spent fighting *against* things, seldom *for* things. The result, in the theatre, was tremendous noise, as if heads were being beaten

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against proscenium arches and bodies were being hurled from the second balcony. But noise, no matter how much of it there is, is not theatre. Odets, Kingsley, Rice, Howard, Anderson, Sherwood and their imitators were America's "angry young men" of the thirties.

The tenement (society) is the villain in *Street Scene,* but in the end, Rosa solved everything by going away from New York. How leaving will solve anything is not clear, but the symbolism *is* clear: escape from this society and life will be beautiful. These portrayers of the revolution, almost to a man, were against racial prejudice and hunger, legal frame-ups and frustration in love, munitions makers and old fashioned mothers, war and big business men. They were for little people and the right to strike, downtrodden people and minorities, workers and liberated sex, proletarianism and freedom.

As a postscript to *Idiot's Delight,* Robert Sherwood wrote: "I believe that the world is populated largely by decent people, and decent people don't want war. Nor do they make war. They fight and die, to be sure—but that is because they have been deluded by their exploiters, who are members of the indecent minority." He spoke for his generation.

The thirties produced violent playwrights who hammered out the same theme play after play, with monotonous regularity. Reading them today comes close to being an embarrassing experience, but something affirmative is caught in this "second" reading of those plays. These men cared deeply, they were impassioned. They cried out the pain of their generation. And interestingly enough, virtually every one of the militant plays of the thirties had hope attached to them. Man, they were saying, is in a terrible condition, society is in a terrible condition, but we will find the answer, the explanation, the goal of freedom.

In one of the most remarkably pretentious plays of the decade, *Winterset,* Maxwell Anderson presents the tragic(?) fate of people living under a tremendous bridge that literally overwhelms the stage. He writes, in very bad verse, a drama of vengeance that is the aftermath of a miscarriage of justice, obviously inspired by the Sacco-Vanzetti case. In the end, Mio and Miriamne lie murdered in the street, and Esdras, the girl's father, concludes the play by saying:

"Oh, Miriamne,
and Mio—Mio, my son, know this where you lie,
this is the glory of earth-born men and women,
not to cringe, never to yield, but standing,
take defeat implacable and defiant
die unsubmitting. . . ."

Some today would call them naïve. Maybe they were, but they fought their battles as men. They were true revolutionaries, albeit, inept.

Today, on the other hand, we live in a post-revolutionary era. Who today would be so gauche as to end his play as Anderson did? Or as Sherwood ended *Abe Lincoln in Illinois,* where the crowd sings a rousing chorus of "John Brown's Body" as Abe's train puffs away in the night? Or as Sherwood, again, has a musical sign-off in *Idiot's Delight,* when Harry and Irene sing "Onward, Christian Soldiers" as bombs are dropping all around them? Certainly not the modern playwright.

Perhaps we are too disillusioned to put up a good fight anymore. A sense of ennui pervades the writing of those vaguely concerned with social and political matters. The state has become so enormously powerful that the individual feels helpless to affect any change. Long ago he gave up on God, and science, once believed the answer to everything, now seems the cause of all men's worst terrors—annihilation. We live under the threat of World War III and its terrible consequences. We have no hope, only the fear of eventual destruction. What is there left to fight for? What is there left to write about? Only men's personal suffering in this hopeless state. And the playwright who has spoken most eloquently of this new suffering is Tennessee Williams.

THIS NEW SUFFERING is unique in history. Always in the past there seemed the possibility of a better life, the possibility of changing things, of having a hand in one's own destiny; but today that is no longer true. Man no longer acts, he is acted upon. The world is antagonistic, the future is black; there remains only one thing to do, peer into the heart of man and watch it

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in the process of breaking up. This suffering is another dimension beyond that of hopelessness; it is a suffering without cause. It is a state concomitant with existence. Man is not responsible for the condition, he is merely a victim. As Querry said in *A Burnt Out Case*, "I suffer, therefore I am."

Williams, from *The Glass Menagerie* to *Night of the Iguana*, enunciates this view with unending persistence. But just as this view of man is false, so are the plays that purport to be pictures of the breaking heart. In a world without God and without hope, possibly many of the things Williams writes about could be true, but the fact is that God *does* exist, and hope derives from that fact. This is not to say Williams should be denied the right to feel the way he does; that is his personal problem. But, what I do object to is his preeminence in the theatre, for this lends respectability to what he says, which in turn leads to the ultimate danger of accepting what he says as true.

And what Williams says is most certainly false. To begin with, man has free will, a fact Williams denies. Even in his most palatable play this denial is revealed. *The Glass Menagerie* begins with this description of the setting: "The Wingfield apartment is in the rear of the building, one of those vast hive-like conglomerations of cellular living-units that flower as warty growths in overcrowded urban centers of lower middle-class population and are symptomatic of the impulse of this largest and fundamentally enslaved section of American society to avoid fluidity and differentiation and to exist and function as one interfused mass of automatism."

Tom opens the play by addressing the audience, more or less setting the action. He says, toward the end, "He (the gentleman caller) is the most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from. But since I have a poet's weakness for symbols, I am using this character also as a symbol; he is the long delayed but always expected something that we live for. . . ."

Williams sets the tone; he even attempts to make the rules for his plays by reshaping man into some automaton. Tom's reference to the gentleman caller is pure cynicism. The gentleman will call, but with disastrous results.

Tom, after the disaster, leaves his mother and sister to fend for themselves, while he leads the poetic life. This is not a sudden action, but one carefully planned almost from the beginning of the play. And yet, to protect the sensitivity of it all, Tom indulges in a bit of self-pity, saying that Laura more or less haunts him at idle moments. Taking rather exaggerated poetic license, he cries out for Laura to blow out her candles (this is to liberate him), and she does. Just before this, he also cries out:

> "Oh, Laura, I tried to leave you
> behind me, but I am more faithful
> than I intended to be!"

What an extraordinary thing to say! Of course, if he really wanted to do something, say, the decent thing, he could go back and take care of the two wretched women. In all the praise that has been heaped upon this play, no one has bothered to wonder what happened to Amanda and Laura after being left high and dry by Tom.

But this is typical of Williams, whose mind rests, while his emotions work at a feverish pitch. Williams perceives no underlying order to life. Beyond the immediate experience, nothing is discernible or worth noting. This, however, is all part of the "new suffering"; nothing really makes sense; all that matters is a vivid emotional experience.

PROBABLY WILLIAMS' BEST PLAY is *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Of all Williams' plays it is the only one that reveals a genuine emotion between a man and woman that is essentially healthy (at least in contrast to other relationships he constructs). Stanley is a rutting animal, yet convincing. Stella's love for him comes through. Unfortunately, Blanche has held the interest of most people because the play seems to be about her. I don't think it is. The primary story concerns the lives of Stella and Stanley; Blanche is a complication in that story. Nevertheless, Blanche has captured the imagination of almost everyone because Williams has constructed a character whose initial impact is overwhelming, but who, upon review, has a fatal flaw that removes her from

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further consideration as a dramatic character.

Blanche is mentally ill. She is an alcoholic nymphomaniac with delusions of grandeur. Williams always keeps Blanche in some remote state. We know she is in Stella's apartment, but the important part of her is off somewhere in smokey dreams. Stanley's rape of her seems more like an assault on the dreams, than on the person. Again, we witness suffering, but it lacks significance. It is meaningless because a play cannot revolve around a psychotic.

These two plays of Williams' reveal a most fundamental weakness of all Williams' work, not only as a revelation of the author's philosophy, but also as theatre.

William's characters, whether psychotic or merely wretched, lack free will and therefore are not the proper subject for a play whose proper subject is man, the whole man, not the truncated little beast formed by Williams' imagination. In a way, Williams has created his own form of natural order in which everyone is constrained by the rigid rules of their status, much as monkeys are ordered by the natural law of God. As Sartre would say, there is no exit. Man without free will cannot be held accountable for his actions. This is the key to all dramatic action; the character must possess free will in order to be able to make a choice between that which fulfills and that which destroys. This, then, involves responsibility which is essential to the principle of justice. The fate of the character must be commensurate with the degree of responsibility he bears for his actions. If the psychotic kills he is not held responsible because he couldn't help himself. Any other verdict would offend the conscience of society.

Williams' major characters suffer from this philosophical flaw. He paints them in riotous colors as if to give them genuine flesh tints, but they remain what they are, irresponsible creatures more in need of sound medical treatment than the sentimentalized pity of first night audiences.

Returning to Blanche, the real play lay in the background. Williams would have had real drama in showing the destruction of Blanche the human being. The same might be said of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Brick is an alcoholic. Apparently he took to the bottle after that sordid business with Skipper; but not, it should be pointed out, because there was a strong homosexual flavor to his relationship with Skipper, but because he feels guilty about hanging up on Skipper at the moment of Skipper's most urgent need for his understanding. The play is static and offensive. In fact, there are too many dramaturgical flaws and too much obscenity for it to be given serious attention at all. But, if Williams insists on writing about such things, if he wants to write genuine drama, then let him go back to the point when Brick was a man facing a crisis, where choice lay before him. As it is, everything is behind him except that much needed cure at Rainbow Hill.

NIGHT OF THE IGUANA suffers from the same defect. Shannon is shown on the verge of another nervous breakdown. He needs a doctor, not the predatory Maxine. But this really sick man is put through the usual antics of suffering. Certainly, we feel sorry for him, but this is the sort of compassion we feel for someone with an awful toothache whose dentist happens to be out of town. Someone might point out that Hannah's past contains a breakdown and is now healthy, even normal. This is true, but this is not Hannah's play; it is Shannon's and she serves to reveal facets of Shannon, not primarily to tell her own story.

And then, Williams has his dope addicts. Here the problem is the same as with the mentally ill. A dope addict is not free; he is chained to his addiction. In *Sweet Bird of Youth*, Princess Kosmonopolis is hooked as the play opens and Chance Wayne is heavily doped up as the play ends. It is interesting to note that when Williams wants to invest Chance with "nobility" in the face of destruction, he has to feed him pills first. Chance, unaided, couldn't have made it. And neither could Williams, who can't imagine true nobility coming from man's soul.

Even *Summer and Smoke*, an otherwise innocuous pastime, ends on the depressing note of addiction. Alma, who began as something "soulful," ends up on the park bench at the foot of the statue "Eternity," feeding on pills that are her "little mercies." The prescription number is 96814. Oddly enough, just why she got this way

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is never developed. It just happens, almost gratuitously.

Williams almost always puts his characters in the fog of addiction or genteel insanity. This stems from his own inability to explain man in rational terms, but then it is possibly too much to ask of most modern men that they reason well while suffering the modern malaise of despair. But, from another perspective, Williams uses these devices out of dramaturgical necessity; he must give his characters dimension. If he cannot form a character possessing the traditional characteristics of humanity, he must do something that will give them an identity. The result is a theatre of the sick and the near-sick.

How different all this is from the revolutionary theatre of the past when men acted out their parts as men, determined to affect a change in their lives and in the world! The world was a wretched place, but the old playwrights were damned if they were going to take a sponge bath in self-pity. They raised a sweat to make a new destiny for their characters; they didn't have the vapors. Today our playwrights write with a limp wrist and a lump in their throats. They have given up the fight; they can only apply compresses to fevered brows.

When there is nothing left to fight for, life dies down and decay sets in.

One of the hallmarks of decay is the abandonment of morality and the savoring of death. The former comes about out of a need to stretch the senses to the breaking point, there being no other purpose in living out the last few moments before oblivion; man's appetites are limitless and the time is so short. The latter arises out of a delight in evil, death being the ultimate evil, the most hated enemy of man. It is torture to embrace death, but after all the senses have been exhausted, this last agony becomes an ecstacy. *Anything* is better than nothing.

WILLIAMS IS A DECADENT WRITER. His work revolves around the double themes of sex and death. But his sex is misshapen and death takes a variety of hideous forms. Probably his two most terrible excursions into the dark areas of the soul are *Sweet Bird of Youth* and *Suddenly Last Summer*. In the former, Chance Wayne is castrated by the father of the girl he infected with his seed, and in the latter, Sebastian is the victim of cannibalism. Chance was a male prostitute and Sebastian a homosexual. On second thought, are they much worse than *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, which attempts to cast a soft glow on homosexuality? But death is not always explicitly present in Williams' plays, it is often around the corner, waiting. Its emissary is decay and a gradual withering away of life. The elderly women enjoy a gentle decline and men become impotent, yearn for castration, or are made homosexuals.

Williams has descended to depths previously unimaginable in the theatre. Williams' most extraordinary play is *The Purification*, in which he glorifies overt incest between brother and sister. The girl is killed by her husband who caught brother and sister *in pari delicto*. The husband is given shabby treatment by both Williams and the chief prosecution witness, the girl's brother. The point is clear that something indefinably beautiful existed between the lovers. If Philistines fail to appreciate it, that is their loss.

When Williams isn't glorifying some sexual perversion, he seems to delight in sticking sexual asides into scenes where they don't really belong. It is almost as if he can't resist the temptation. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, there is that infamous elephant story, as well as Big Daddy's gratuitous description of an experience in Morocco. Blanche, among her other afflictions, was married to a homosexual who was a sensitive boy, but who wasn't really meant for her. Hannah, in *Night of the Iguana*, tells of her two experiences with "love"; one nonsensical, the other totally unbelievable and disgusting. Williams loads the deck but loses the trick because no one will believe that a decent, attractive woman like Hannah would not have had some other males in her life. The whole thing is ridiculous.

Williams presents depravity either with indifference, as if it were the usual thing, or with approval, as if it were the desired thing. In either case he tries to tell us that these things exist, and that therefore they are true. They *do* exist, but where Williams makes his mistake is in assuming they are within the natural order of things. They

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are not. We are all aware of homosexuality. We know about rape, incest, voyeurism, fetishes, lesbianism, cannibalism, and anything else Williams might want to add to the list. But these things are to be found in medical books because the medical profession, as well as most of society, knows that these are abnormalities that should be studied and treated for what they are. And Williams' saying otherwise won't make it so. Williams' ultimate confusion is to be found in his insistence that we pity these diseased people because they *are* diseased. He is saying that to take away the disease is to deprive them of their beauty, their sensitivity. In other words, it is the malady that is good, not necessarily the man. The rational man, however, is capable of separating the disease from the man. The Christian is capable of hating the disease because he loves the man. Let's not talk of, say, homosexuality, but rather of tuberculosis. What man in his right mind would consider tuberculosis a worthy and beautiful thing? We hate the disease and because we hate it, we have compassion for the man afflicted. And compassion is the first step toward effecting a cure.

The theatre can contain any abnormality if it has some context, if the playwright brings some perspective to play, if he will present perversion for what it is. But to carry on as if there were no genuine difference between the abnormal and the normal is to break down the final barrier against insanity.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS, unless he changes drastically, cannot extend his work or his vision further. True, he may have a few reserve tricks with which to shock future audiences, but nothing new will emerge. And this for the simple reason that there is nowhere to go once you have embraced total despair.

What is man, according to Williams? Most important, he is impotent. He is trapped in a hostile world, incapable of acting, but only acted upon. He suffers unbearably. He is not responsible for this condition, being imposed upon by inexplicable forces. The result is a senseless suffering with no escape. Periodically, man reacts violently to this intolerable situation, but these brief frenzies only make the situation worse. The only way to lessen the agony is to lose oneself in dream-like reverie and so withdraw, however briefly, from reality, or drown oneself in the sensual.

The greatest talent Williams has is to show this pain. He does it in dramatic terms so eloquent as to verge on the exquisite. No one can deny the pain of a Laura or a Shannon, but their pain has no significance. It is senseless. It has no cause, no release.

This despondent view cannot be shared by the Christian for whom suffering has significance, a cause, and a release. But the Christian voice is scarcely heard today, particularly in the theatre where Williams flourishes.

Is Williams merely a caretaker, waiting for some master to once again lift the theatre out of its present decline? Or, is Williams the new master himself?

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DRAWINGS

BY

AVBREY BEARDSLEY

AVBREY
BEARDSLEY

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AUBREY BEARDSLEY *(1872-1898) was born at Brighton into an impoverished but genteel family who claimed, on the basis of vague testamentary evidence, to have been descended from the great Pitt. His education was slight: a few years at Brighton and at Hurstpierspoint—broken by a brief sojourn at Epsom when tubercular symptoms developed when he was nine years old—and then return to Brighton, where he finished as a day pupil at the Grammar School. His formal education ended when he was twelve; and his considerable erudition in literature and music, as well as in art, was developed on his own. At the age of eleven, he and his sister Mabel Beardsley (later a well-known actress) were billed together in concerts as "infant musical prodigies."*

In 1888, when Beardsley was sixteen, he was apprenticed to an architect. This training is reflected in the formal gardens, baroque sculpturings, rococo edifices which figure in his drawings. After a few months with the architect, Beardsley moved to London and worked (1889-1891) as a clerk in the Guardian Life and Fire Assurance Company. He spent his spare hours in drawing, developing his incredible skill with line. A vivacious conversationalist—witty, charming, impulsively generous—he made friends easily: artists such as Burne-Jones and Puvis de Chavannes; the publisher and bookseller, Frederick Evans, who secured his first commission (1891) to illustrate an edition of Malory's Morte d'Arthur. *He made over 350 illustrations for the* Morte d'Arthur, *in a kind of faked woodcut style, Burne-Jonesy and "over-drawn." The discipline of this task schooled him well, although his own truly original qualities were not fully evident. This flowing-haired style of his was to be echoed by many children's-story illustrators in the early years of the Twentieth Century. But it was the erotic and witty drawings he was to make for* Salome *and* Lysistrata, *for* The Yellow Book *and* The Savoy, *which were to give the epithet "Beardsleyesque" its sinister connotations. In 1891 he left the Assurance Company and plunged into the vortex of London artistic life. He was not yet twenty years old.*

In his twenty-first year (1893) his genius became fully evident: the sardonic and bizarre drawings he made for Oscar Wilde's Salome *evidence a completely crystallized personality. With uncanny critical percipience, Beardsley realized that the Wilde play was an inferior work, and he mocked, in his illustrations, both Wilde and the text of the play itself. Wilde did not like the illustrations. (Wilde and Beardsley seem to have detested each other: Wilde's sneering, "Dear Aubrey has grass-green hair and can never forget that he has been to Dieppe—once," was to draw from Beardsley a group of increasingly mordant caricatures of Wilde.)*

Henry Harland chose Beardsley as the Art Editor of The Yellow Book *(so named for its yellow covers, modeled after those of the mildly lubricious French novels of the period). He contributed to the first four issues (1894-1895); it was mostly his wittily suggestive drawings which made* The Yellow Book *the scandalous success that it was. The fifth issue (April, 1895, the month of the Wilde trial) with even more daring drawings was set up at the printer, but the drawings and the plates were cancelled upon the protests of two then-influential Victorian nonentities, Sir William Watson and Mrs. Humphrey Ward. Beardsley was dropped from* The Yellow Book, *which rapidly became an insipid publication. Arthur Symons invited him to be Art Editor of* The Savoy *(January, 1896); and there he published his only writings: three poems, and a bowdlerized version of an erotic rendering of the Venus and Tannhäuser story,* Under The Hill.

The Wilde trial destroyed many persons whose names had been linked with Wilde's. Beardsley, who had illustrated Salome, *was ruined also. It was particularly unfair in the case of Beardsley, who had strong erotic attachments to women, and who had always despised Wilde and his crowd of pathics. Embittered, he signed a contract with a publisher of erotica; for this man he did a series of scabrous drawings. After his conversion, he regretted this moral lapse; on his deathbed, he vainly urged the disreputable publisher to destroy them. During 1896, his health rapidly declined, the tubercular symptoms flared up, and he underwent a profound religious experience. In March of 1897—exactly one year before his death—he was received into the Roman Catholic Church. The last year was spent at Dieppe and Mentone (he lacked money to go farther South), making drawings and reading in the Saints and Fathers of the Church. From his death-bed, he wrote to the publisher, "in my death agony," beseeching him "by all that is Holy" to "burn all obscene drawings." Toward the end, he seemed to derive a special comfort from the contemplation of a portrait of Saint Alphonsus Liguori. His mother and Mabel were with him when he died, in the odour of sanctity, scarcely more than a boy. As Arthur Symons said, "Beardsley ended a long career at the age of twenty-five."*

His influence—at first merely faddish—was enormous. Whole schools of book illustrators exfoliated from his manifold phases. R. A. Walker wrote: "His followers, or rather his imitators, have never really grasped his essential quality, the cold, clear, biting line, the perfection of balance in his design, his amazing economy of beautiful detail, his daring use of black and white mass and his unerring instinct for correct values." A limited edition of fifty drawings was issued in 1897. During the 1920's, he was so popular that his selected drawings were in the Modern Library.

Mabel Beardsley lived on until 1917. As she lay dying, Yeats wrote of her: "And how should her heart fail her/ Or sickness break her will/ With her dead brother's valour/ For an example still?"

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Aubrey Beardsley.

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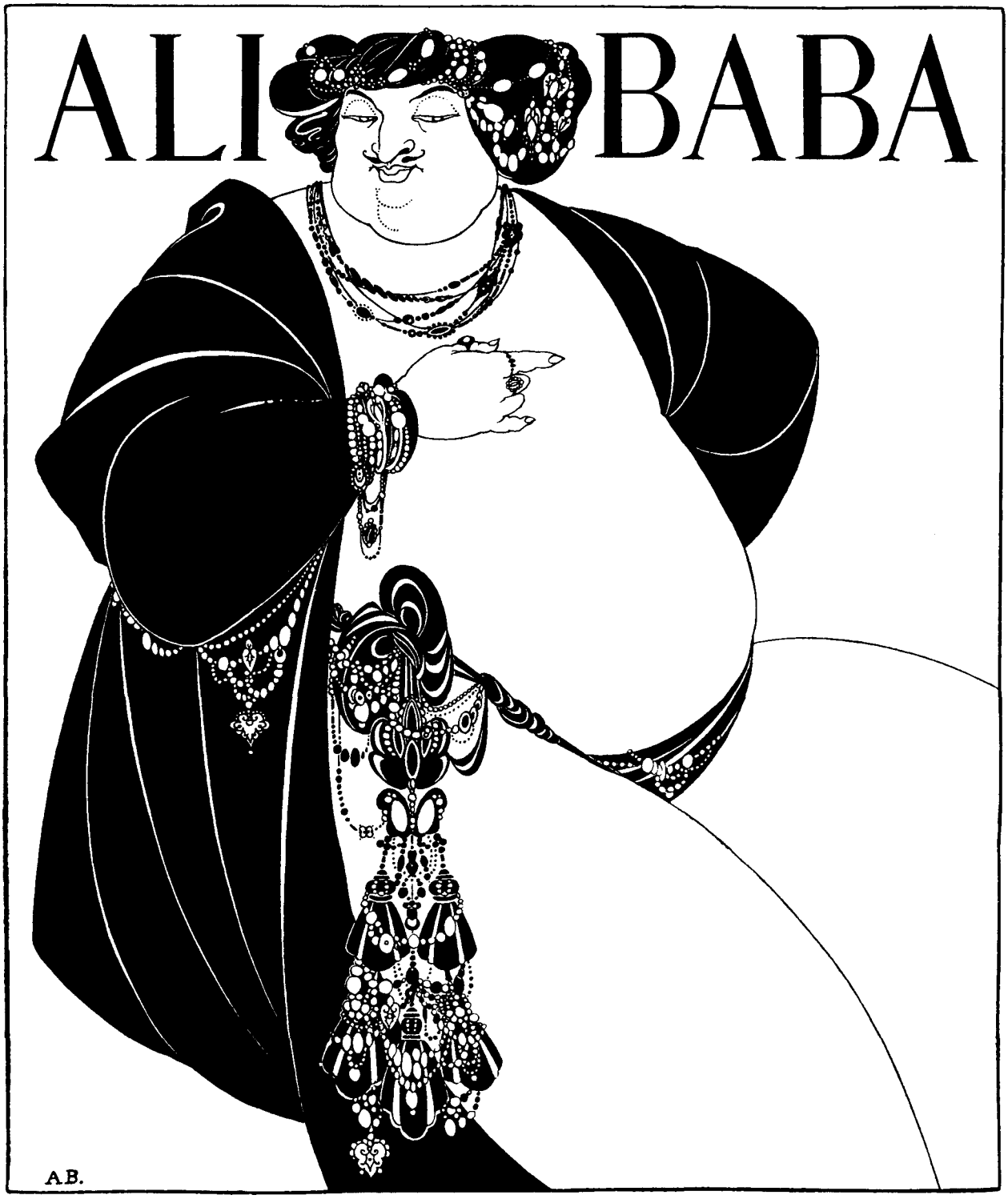

ALI BABA

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COUNT VALMONT of *Les Liaisons Dangeureuses*

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JOHN BULL

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AN EVIL MOTHERHOOD

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THE KISS OF JUDAS

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SALOME ON SETTLE

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VIRGIN AND CHILD

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THE ASCENSION OF SAINT ROSE OF LIMA

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THE DEATH OF PIERROT

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BOOK REVIEWS

Ship of Fools. By Katherine Anne Porter. Boston: Atlantic-Little, Brown. 497 pp. $6.50.

Those who would like to preserve the idea of 20th century man as naturally good, blamelessly erring, perfectable if he will just use his reason and good instincts are not going to like Katherine Anne Porter's *Ship of Fools*. Others will have their peace of mind disturbed, especially the bigots, autocrats, self-deceived, insensate and selfish of every degree. In fact only an absolute fool could read this 497 page mirror of man's stupidity with composure. We are all passengers on the ship *Vera* whether we like it or not, and what we see shatters many of our most flattering illusions. It is bound to be a controversial book, dealing as it does with our stupidities, but prospective readers should know immediately that the treatment is neither malicious nor sentimental, only honest in the portrayal of sin for what it is. Miss Porter's rare insight into the difficulties of moral decision along with a firm conviction that evil is something more than a social nuisance raise the work above the level of the realistic shocker to a beautiful timeless moral commentary, and a profoundly religious novel of the soul on its difficult way to eternity.

The scope and scale of her theme are vast, but Miss Porter manages it with all the intelligence, vision, precision of language, and disciplined intensity of feeling that mark a masterpiece.

But like any great book it is easy to misread or not to read. So unless he understands the kind of book he is involved with, a reader's reactions are likely to be far off center, his criticisms ineffectual. Ironically, the most fatuous readings and reviews have been by such strenuous moralists as J. Donald Adams (see his remarks in the *New York Times Book Review*) and those who accept the fact of Original Sin (see Father Gardiner's "review" in *America*). And strange to say, they reprove the author of a deeply Christian allegory for her harsh view of man, for failing to recognize his true nature in depicting him as hopelessly enmeshed in the follies of unreason. This assertion is so far off center and misleading that it invites more than a conventional review for those who have not read the book; it makes urgent a re-view for those who have misread it.

Certainly the author could not make her intention more clear. She tells in a little unpretentious Foreword, easy to read, that her title is a translation from the German of *Das Narrenschiff*, a late 15th century moral allegory by Sebastian Brant, and that she took for her own use "this simple almost universal image of the ship of this world on its voyage to eternity." Then almost as explicity she places her *Ship of Fools* in that long tradition of the moral allegory which lay so deep in the consciousness of medieval man. The image, she says, "is by no means new —it was very old and durable and dearly familiar when Brant used it; and it suits my purpose exactly. I am a passenger on that ship."

Patently, this book, like Brant's, must be read as a moral allegory in the medieval tradition of "Folly" literature which derives its spirit from Ecclesiastes and the *Old Testament*. Miss Porter achieves her serious moral purpose by a medieval underscoring of folly in its infinite forms, but more in the spirit and with the satirical imagination and wit of an Erasmus, than the mirthless dogmatism of a Brant.

But to appreciate the richness of this achievement readers must follow Charles Lamb's advice to those who would understand the paintings of the satirist Hogarth (with whom Miss Porter has much in common): "You *look* at other pictures, but you *read* Hogarth." Or follow Miss Porter's advice to readers of Henry James: "A reader has got to pay attention and treat a complex and first rate artist with respect. It means you've got to read every word he writes." Details are important to a craftsman of her caliber who has dedicated a long life to studying what she calls "the thumbprint" of humanity, and who looks upon her writing as a "vocation" for which she says "I was and am willing to die, and I consider very few other things of the slightest importance."

In fact when *reading Ship of Fools* it is even worth attending to the cover design; the golden exterior, and the Homeric "wine-dark sea" swirling on the interior are as perfectly symbolical of the body and vision of the story as the decorative designs on the medieval manuscripts. Even the publication date should not be overlooked. For thirty years Miss Porter resisted the pressures of publishers and audience and the temptation of a quick pot of gold, and then presented her book with typical timing and relevance on April 1st, *All Fools Day*—known to Sebastian Brant as "The Feast of Fools" on which all fools were free to criticize and satirize, parade and play the sinful frailties of the high and low. This feast of fools spirit permeates the entire allegory giving sharpness to the irony and added comic dimension to the excesses of the travelers on the *Vera*.

Another important detail is the opening two-sentence paragraph, a masterful condensation of the main theme and viewpoint of the author. The first reads: "The port town of Veracruz is a little purgatory between land and sea for the traveler,

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but the people who live there are very fond of themselves and the town they have helped to make." The diction is simple, pure, and typical of the whole book: no hidden symbols or subtleties, nothing flashy, only words sparingly chosen and exactly placed to communicate the two intended levels of meaning. Literally, Veracruz is a purgatory; and allegorically, the *world* is a purgatory that *men have helped to make*. The key word is *fond*, meaning "*foolishly* loving" or "regarded with *unreasoning* affection," and it embodies the incisive moral judgment and humane vision of the author that the greatest folly and the source of human unhappiness is *unreasoning* love of self and the world.

The other sentence of the first paragraph develops the idea of man's condign state, and then names the generic evils with which he builds his purgatory: ". . . they carry on their lives of alternate violence and lethargy with a pleasurable contempt for outside opinion, founded on the charmed notion that their ways and feelings are above and beyond criticism." Whether the generic evils of violence, lethargy, and pride are Aristotelian-Thomistic is not a concern here, but St. Thomas does say that sloth destroys the inner peace of the soul, the effect of charity, and leads to disagreement with all men, then separation from them, and finally war against them. In any case, this sequence forms the dramatic structure of *Ship of Fools:* alternate waves of spiritual and physical inertia and cold malice among individuals lead to climactic open warfare during the captain's party toward the end of the voyage.

This same sentence isolates another related cause of strife among individuals, races, and nations. Springing from foolish self-love and the illusion of self-sufficiency is the malignancy of ethical relativism: "the charmed notion that their ways and feelings are above and beyond criticism." Again a single apt word, "charmed" (notice, not "charming") captures the cause and end of man's folly: he is *allured as if by a spell* to the *notion* that he is the maker of his own law, and is responsible to no one but himself. The sound and connotation of the word set the tone of the narrative as well as Miss Porter's attitude toward the deluded pilgrims; she is understanding and compassionate, but not tolerant of folly. Thus her treatment of racial and religious prejudice in the middle section of the book is not a sentimental defense of any one race or nation, but a brilliantly clear dramatic indictment of "the charmed notion" that causes stupid cruelties in *all* quarters, turning Christian against Jew, German against Jew, revolutionist against Jew and Catholic, and Jew against Jew, Catholic and German. The endless waves of hatred begin with excessive self-concern: "It didn't matter to him [Lowenthal] what the Goyim thought of him, whether they liked him or not. He didn't like them so he was a jump ahead of them from the start . . . he would get what he wanted out of them by himself, and no thanks to anybody. All he wanted in the world was the right to be himself, to go where he pleased and do what he wanted without any interference from Them."

Certainly it would be unfair to judge a novel or recommend it from a single paragraph, but any sound literary judgment must ultimately rest upon the words of the author, not on vague general impressions of the kind some reviewers have written. It is especially necessary to read *Ship of Fools* closely because Miss Porter sets up her moral and word pattern in the first paragraph, and as the novel unfolds, the complex elements of character and plot derive from that pattern with absolute consistency to the end.

For example, as we accompany the travelers through Veracruz on the way to the boat in the first twenty pages of the book, we notice (if we are less blind than they) the alternate lethargy and violence of the natives as a result of their total preoccupation with themselves individually and in the mass. Outsiders are strangers to be eyed with sightless indifference or treated with methodical brutality. And they are all strangers to each other in this city they have helped to make. The first human figure we see in the novel is an emaciated Indian in the city square who "seemed to sleep, sitting upright, arms folded," and "unaware" of the deformed beggar who crawls across the street and lies behind him. The first sounds we hear are the rattling chains of a "bored" monkey teasing a "monotonously cursing" parrot. The absolute inertia of the city is broken only briefly by news of a bomb explosion at the Swedish Consulate. A man yawns as he examines a page-sized picture of a disemboweled Indian boy killed in the explosion. The Indian who seemed asleep moves just enough "with perfect swiftness and economy" to kick a dog. Scene, image, and word begin to build and reinforce the basic allegorical pattern: everyone, native and traveler alike, is a *stranger* who goes his own *private, secret* way, *blind, bored, indifferent* to everyone, emerging from his shell only long enough to look with cold malice on an intruder. This is a joyless purgatorial city because there is no hospitality, no charity.

And soon we learn that there is little charity in the "straggling pro-

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cession of passengers" who ascend the gangplank to the *Vera*, each one carrying a "caricature on a passport." The procession, but for lack of conical cap and bells, could be a 15th century "feast of fools" parade of grotesques led by two blue-black jawed priests, a shapeless dwarf, and a dying dark whiskered man in a wheel chair followed by a seven-foot giant and fat pig-like people. The inner deformities are even worse in the disarrayed assortment of North Americans, Germans, Spaniards, and Mexicans who board the ship and begin to display their self-concern in small waves of petty bickering over cabins, berths, and deckchairs—and lapse into silence: "Even those persons obviously related in whatever way sat mute as if with strangers."

For the next twenty-six days the lives of nearly fifty passengers and 876 "souls" in steerage ebb and flow around one another like the sea. Characters touch tentatively and then flee from each other in waves of lust and repulsion, lethargy and violence. David and Jenny, two young Americans, love and hate each other; a skinny peahen Lizzi Spockenkieker tantalizes and turns from pig-faced Siegfried Rieber; a giant Arne Hansen pursues and gets duped by a slatternly Spanish dancer; a pair of poisonous twins, Ric and Rac, embrace and claw each other's flesh; a widow Mrs. Treadwell lusts for and rejects a ship's officer; a boy Johann nurses and hates his dying uncle. And all the while a "secret society" of Cuban students snake-dance around deck providing a commentary on universal selfishness with their raucous refrain in honor of the queen predator "La Cucaracha."

Very few passengers seem untouched by the evil tides that seep through the boat from top to bottom: the little unnamed woodcarver from steerage who drowns rescuing a dog, and the blissfully happy newlyweds who "exclude from their attention all but their love." Some show signs of weathering the voyage: Jenny's romantic illusions of love are replaced by a glimmer of the truth that love is sacrifice. Johann feels a first pang of remorse for his treatment of his uncle. Mrs. Treadwell comes to know sympathy for the anguish of others, and Frau Schmitt learns that "it is touching to be human, to love one's fellow creature, to have mercy on the poor and unfortunate." A hasty reader might miss these changes because they are revealed, as so often in life, in a silent sign of the cross or a little undramatic act of human charity, but a careful observer will know at the end of the voyage that there is hope for these people even if, as Ecclesiastes said, "the perverse are hard to correct, and the number of fools is infinite."

Even so, if this is all the reader-voyager sees on the *Vera* he will miss fully half the meaning and much of the balance of the allegory, and may have reason to go down the gangplank bored as most of the passengers—and some of the critics.

Miss Porter's ardent perception of the highest Christian values is embodied in Dr. Schumann, the ship's physician. He is at the center of the story, not a hero in the usual sense, simply a virtuous Christian realistically drawn, and therefore no more conspicuous or dazzling on the surface than true Charity. His professional ministrations bring him into contact with moral disease, and he is infected, yet still he rises above his sordid surroundings like the dimly visible and symbolical church spire in the background of a Hogarth painting.

The first hint about his place in the allegory comes through the fact that he is not in the "procession" of grotesques that board the ship in Veracruz, but looks down on them from the deck with eyes of "abstract goodness and even sweetness." Shortly later we learn that he is a man of *Faith* who "believed in God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, and the Blessed Virgin Mother of God finally, in a particularly forthright Bavarian Catholic way." Of course he sins like all pilgrim fools, but unlike the weaker ones he has a constant *Hope*, and prayerfully asks Divine forgiveness for his guilty love of the Condessa, and the strength "to make his reparations for the wrongs he had done, in silence, as part of his penance." A firm resolution gives him a sense of "the divine narcotic of hope, and relief of conscience," but aware that his *Charity* is not perfect he struggles for true contrition: silently "under his breath, 'Mother of God be my refuge!' and crossed himself. . . . He walked slowly once around the deck, making up his mind to look for one of those priests and go to confession, and to receive Holy Communion in the early morning. For the first time in a great while, he felt not the right contrition, that good habit of the spirit, but a personal shame, a crushing humiliation at the disgraceful nature of what he had to confess."

And Dr. Schumann has many other lusterless easily overlooked virtues. Among the many fools he is prudent, even if not perfectly. Perhaps he sins in his love for the Condessa, and is often guilty of a silent complicity in the evil actions of others, but never does he rationalize or excuse his faults though he knows that "the impulses that drove us were grounded in Original Sin, in which I believe as I do the Real Presence." Instead, he is "watchful in prayer," asking fortitude against ridicule, indecision, temptation, and despair. He is a just man, tired of "those strange senseless states of mind" that cause racial and religious prejudice. He is temperate, in fact "abstemious" among a boatload of gluttons who "ate as if there were no God." And he is modest, chaste, and faithful to his marriage vows on a ship that is like "a floating brothel."

There is no need to continue the catalogue of virtues here if the reader will go to the story and give it the kind of attention a great complex work of art deserves. He will find there what the disturbed reviewers have somehow failed to see: the truth that Dr. Schumann and all fools are capable of reaching the "harbor" however difficult the voyage may be

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—but surely not by unaided reason alone, for as the Doctor explains, "There was a mystery in the destiny of man beyond fathoming, except in the light of divine revelation; at the very bottom of life there is an unanswerable riddle, and it is just there . . . where man leaves off, that God begins."

Not only does Dr. Schumann embody and express the highest Christian ideals (imperfectly, of course, because he is human), Katherine Anne Porter herself—like Ecclesiastes, the Fathers of the Church, and the medieval allegorists—gives most explicit directions to all pilgrim fools who will shake off their lethargy and *look*. Heading the last section of the book, in ironic contrast with the first sentence of the allegory, is a quotation from St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews: "For here we have no continuing city . . ." This and the whole of the Epistle is the vision and meaning of *Ship of Fools*: *"Let the charity of the brotherhood abide in you. And hospitality do not forget; for by this some, being not aware of it have entertained angels."*

—Edward F. Murphy

Christianity in Modern Art, by Frank and Dorothy Getlein; Milwaukee; The Bruce Publishing Company; 227 pp; $5.00.

A book on Christianity in modern art is not (nor can it ever be) like other books on other movements in modern art: for no style defines the Christianity in modern art in the way that styles and idiomatic ways of seeing define every other kind of "movement" in modern art. What the authors are faced with, then, is writing a book which covers the whole of modern art and architecture insofar as it falls into the light of Christianity.

Where to turn in search of that body of work that has fallen into the light of Christianity? The answer is not at all what it would have been in Medieval or Renaissance times. Then one would have turned to the Church, mother and patron of the arts. Now the rift between the modern man and the Church, the artist and the Christian tradition, forces us to look elsewhere, for it has become impossible for an artist to be born, to live and to create entirely within the Christian heritage, since that heritage is simply not there for the modern man. As the authors state, "unlike the Christian art of most other times, modern art in Christianity has been produced for the most part without the patronage of the Church. It has come solely from the faith of the artists, from the artistic vocation, and from the awareness of the artist of the situation of modern man."

The Getleins maintain that the new Christian artist, born outside of the heritage, has both an advantage and a disadvantage. On the one hand, he runs the risk of losing himself in self-absorption. On the other, he is left free to go "directly to the meaning of things rather than confine himself to appearances." One of the weaknesses of this book is the kind of over-simplification involved in such statements. It never quite carries beyond simple assertion. Although the book is generously illustrated and the commentaries on the illustrations are quite detailed, the commentaries generally confine themselves to purely descriptive analyses of the quality of the line or the richness of the color or the heaviness of the shape. How the works reflect, on a level beyond the appearances of a Christian subject matter, a uniquely Christian outlook on life is not made clear, and this failure constitutes the chief weakness of the book. Recalling Romano Guardini's remark that one should be able to sight a Christian even by the way he clambers up a tree, one aches for a Guardini-like elucidation of what makes a piece of Christian art Christian and not simply religious in subject matter.

Though the Getleins have not gone beyond the subject matter to justify the presence of most of the works discussed in their book, they have taken subject matter a long way. The book opens with a treatment of the 19th century German artist, Heinrich Hofmann, whose saccharine kind of Christ-image they hold largely responsible for the degeneration of Christian sensibility and the misrepresentation that Christianity suffers in the plaster-cast "art" of churches today. The reaction against Hofmann was violent. The authors deal in detail with two leaders of the reaction, the German Expressionist Emil Nolde and the French Expressionist Georges Rouault. Salvador Dali receives a dishonorable mention for the professionalism of his "Sacrament of the Last Supper" and the "Christ of Saint John of the Cross." An interesting chapter is devoted to the religious painters in Paris and America who have matured within the abstract expressionist tradition. The chapter entitled "The Hand of Craft" includes a whole range of art that rarely receives mention in art books, on the quite valid ground that craft work does not require, or even permit, the kind of intense self-expression that the plastic arts engage in. Through crafts many amateurs who could not otherwise achieve self-expression are able to produce much skillful and worthwhile work. The sculptures of Sir Jacob Epstein, Ernst Barlach, Gerhard Marcks, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, and Jacques Lipchitz receive a chapter to themselves. The modern churches of Antoni Gaudí in Barcelona, and several of the new churches in Europe and America are described in detail. One other chapter is devoted to prints, and another to the theme of "the Cross."

The Getleins make it clear that what they are interested in is not the legally baptized kind of Christian art, but the art of men, Christian or not, who voice the great Christian themes. One finishes reading this book with the assurance that these artists and craftsmen all share a unity of spirit, and this is a good thing to behold. Together they are trying, as

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moderns, to express the theme of salvation, be it in the context of a roaring beast or a family group, a prophet or a clown, a cross or a cathedral, a triumph or a crown of thorns.

This spirit and assurance are captured in an imposing bronze sculpture by Jacques Lipchitz entitled "Our Lady of Joy," which is in the church of Notre Dame de Toute Grace in Assy, France. It embodies the action of the Holy Spirit on men. Our Lady is its subject. She stands within a canopy-like stream of bronze held in the beak of the Dove poised directly above her head. Where we look for a face on the Virgin, we find only a dark recess. Standing alone, she would be called blind, but standing as she does, within the open bell of the Dove's canopy, she lives and fully mediates His kind of life. Here man's darkness is looped and encompassed with the flowing energy of the Holy Spirit. Out of what alone was blindness comes a deep and whole kind of vision; what on its own would have been a faltering stance assumes universal proportions as a posture of benediction and encouragement over the whole world. Applying to the work of the artists represented in this book, this statue seems to speak of that wholeness that is inherent in their otherwise dark and fragmentary efforts at self-expression, efforts pointing in the same direction, but originating from conflicting camps of the spirit. The statue is done by a Jew. It stands in a Catholic Church. This church also contains a mosaic exterior by a Marxist (Fernand Léger), a baptistry by another Jew (Marc Chagall), a stained glass window by a Catholic (Rouault), and altar pieces by two agnostics (Matisse and Bonnard). In an Age of Faith, this church would be considered a blasphemy. In an age when artists must work on their own, outside of, rather than within, a religious heritage, one cannot doubt the sincerity of this enterprise.

The Getleins' book, is, at its best, like this church. Unfortunately the book is not always at its best. At times it amounts to little more than a rapid survey of who did what and how it is religious, leaving the reader with the kind of feeling a tourist gets after visiting too many museums too quickly.

—Robert Del Tredici

The Contemporary English Novel. By Frederick R. Karl. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy. 304 pp. $4.95.

This book is of mainly clinical interest. It illustrates all the ills of writing on current literature, with the additional complication that it is one of those books that get there first. Karl has undertaken to survey and evaluate the English novel from 1930 to the present. He devotes chapters to Samuel Beckett, Lawrence Durrell, C. P. Snow, Graham Greene, Elizabeth Bowen, Joyce Cary, George Orwell, Evelyn Waugh, Henry Green, and Ivy Compton-Burnett. In composite chapters he treats the Angry Young Men, another group he calls the Moral Allegorists (William Golding, Iris Murdoch, Rex Warner, and P. H. Newby), and a group of comic writers (Anthony Powell, Angus Wilson, Nigel Dennis). Inevitably, in an enterprise like this one, there will be an exceedingly mixed last chapter into which Everyone Else must be packed. Karl's includes Pamela Hansford Johnson, L. P. Hartley, Alan Sillitoe, Christopher Isherwood, V. S. Pritchett, Brian Glanville, and numerous others. Then there must be a philosophic foreword and afterword. The former will attempt some retrospective generalizations, and the latter will be a mixture of exhortation and augury. About the whole enterprise, there will be an air of desperate and breathless urgency. Someplace in the title and as often as possible in the text must appear the word *contemporary*, it being a favorite honorific with writers of books that get there first.

On a subject like the one Karl has here addressed himself to, perfection is not to be had. More or less as Karl settles Waugh's hash, Waugh brings out another novel. This is inconvenient all right, but there are ways of dealing with it. One can decide, for example that his will be a *well-written* book. This is the solution favored by the British. "I may be wrong," the reasoning runs, "but I'm going to be entertaining." The result is often a book that exhibits a cheerful irreverence about fact but one sharply conceptualized and written, also one that shows taste and an acquaintance with the classics. The other way of doing it, the American Way, is to write a book that looks *sound*. This will have approximately the bulk and texture of a doctoral dissertation. It will, in general, play safe. Its author will feel obliged to read all the books he mentions or to pretend that he has, and he will dump down in his pages elaborate synopses of a goodly share of them. He will confine himself to low-level inferences about the books in question, and these he will clothe in a high-flying language that he hopes will pass for scientific. It is the language of the literary specialist, you see, and it must have the appropriate ponderousness. Wit must be avoided as frivolous, also taste. Instead of being quickly sensed and wittily presented, judgments must be laboriously arrived at and supported. And the labor must show. There is a third approach, but this is rare because it requires abilities not often found in one person: analytic power, scholarly stamina, and stylistic sense. Karl's book makes the mistake of trying this approach. Hitherto a writer mainly of Reader's Guides to this and that, he has got badly out of his depth.

His book is worst stylistically. For the usual difficulties of writing on current writing are here made worse by the fact that this is one of those books that get there first. The results of this and of bad editing are to be seen on every page. There are plain solecisms, as when Karl writes

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of the *demonical* heroes of Graham Greene when he means *demonic* or *demoniac*. Or when he uses *limitations* where he means *disadvantages*: "To be this knowledgeable while still an apprentice does have *limitations*. . . ." Or when he says an Orwell book "fails as successful satire" or one by Nigel Dennis "fails to succeed." Or one by Elizabeth Bowen is "too overly feminine." Then there are the solecisms of grammar and phrasing: "This attitude is of course antithetical to the real rebel" or "His exile is from his self" or "In all three, their Christian existentialism does not preclude. . . ." Karl's troubles with common usage are nothing, however, to the splendor of his way with a cliché or a mixed metaphor. The clichés are of interestingly varied lineage. One set is the patter of the quarterlies: dichotomy, symbolic motif, ultimately. Another set is from the weekly reviews: "sweeping vision," "blinding clarity," "fearless castigator of social and political nonsense." There are the reviewer's standard triads too: "honest, intelligent, and well written" and "exciting, surprising, major" and "large, experimental and daring." There is also a fondness for saying things three times: "the big novel, the broad canvas, the major work." Among the mixed metaphors, every reader will have personal favorites. Mine were these: "The Christian attitude explicitly applied to the novel dilutes the tragic vision." The other is a lot more involved, but it is a virtuoso performance: "The comic novel usually is receptive to a certain scattering of the seed, while a serious novel calls for intensity of characterization and almost an entirely different tone. In her four novels, Miss Murdoch falls between both camps; the result is that her novels fail to coalesce as either one or the other." But this is to be long about Karl's prose style, it is a poor thing enough.

His book is only a little more accurate than well written. He opines, for example, that the English novelists who have come along since 1930 are a more English lot than the generation of Lawrence, Joyce and Conrad: ". . . C. P. Snow, Elizabeth Bowen, Joyce Cary, and Evelyn Waugh, to name only four contemporaries, clearly are, whether for good or ill, English." Whether for good or ill, Joyce Cary was, and Elizabeth Bowen is, Irish. Of other novelists discussed by Karl, George Orwell was born in Bengal. Samuel Beckett was born and educated in Ireland. He has lived much of his life in France and since 1945 has been writing in French. Christopher Isherwood came to America in 1940 and has been an American citizen since 1947. Lawrence Durrell is Irish. William Golding is an English Jew. Muriel Spark is a Scotswoman. All whether for good or ill.

Karl also informs us that class structure has disappeared from the major English novel. This would be a notable development indeed, but to suggest that it has come about is ridiculous. Karl's argument on this point is strikingly circular, even as these things go in his pages. If one objects, for example, that class structure is very prominent in Waugh, Karl replies that Waugh is not major. If one objects that class structure is very prominent in Snow, whom Karl mistakenly takes for major, then he replies that it is not the sort of class structure he has in mind. It is impossible to break a circle like this, but in the novels of such various writers as George Orwell, Anthony Powell, and Kingsley Amis it is sufficiently evident that class has not disappeared at all.

We also learn that the recent English novel has lost bulk and scope, which will surprise Angus Wilson, whose books, one would say, bulk up nicely. Readers of the trilogies of Cary and Waugh will also be surprised, as will readers of the *Alexandria Quartet* and of the five novels of Anthony Powell's *Music of Time*. Also those will be surprised who have come through the eight volumes (eleven are promised) of C. P. Snow's *Strangers and Brothers*, if indeed it is possible to come through that experience without a permanently impaired affect. At any rate, Karl's performance at making low-level inferences about the recent novel is not exactly inspiring.

Nor is he any better at larger critical judgments. It does not occur to him, for example, to question the critical orthodoxy which makes Conrad, Lawrence, and Joyce the great novelists of the first part of the century. Not to question the orthodoxy of his own time is the distinguishing habit of Karl's mind. Also, raising inconvenient questions greatly impedes getting there first. Conrad is secure among the great. But what of Lawrence? Even many of his professed admirers will allow that he was not much of a novelist and will prefer to speak of him as sage or prophet. And what of Joyce? All precincts have not reported, but late returns are running heavily against him. But none of this seems to have occurred to Karl. Nor does he appear to have heard of Wyndham Lewis, nor David Jones, giants of older generations. Of younger writers, Karl makes no mention of Malcolm Lowry who wrote one surely classic novel, *Under the Volcano*. The inclusion of Lowry would have forced, however, the qualification of three of Karl's cherished notions: that the recent novel has been extremely English, that it has avoided ambitious subjects, and that it has not been written to a very exalted standard of style.

Before considering Karl's rankings of individual novelists, a word about the principle on which these rankings rest. Karl believes in experimentation in the novel, this in a touchingly literal way: "Experimentation is always to be encouraged, but it can easily lead to disastrous results. . . ." Why is it always to be encouraged then? Experimentation has with Karl the status that discussion and education have with one kind of liberal. And because he is such a liberal, you see, and so sincere and all, he must always have a good word for it. Thus we are not surprised to find him giving highest marks in the class to Samuel Beckett

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and Lawrence Durrell. It does not matter that the novels of these men, very far from being experimental, are extremely derivative. There is a show of experimentation in Beckett, for example, that would not deceive a forward girl scout, but it has been enough to take in Karl. Beckett is taken as the greatest writer to come along since 1930, but his prose, far from being experimental, is lifted from Joyce and his ideas from Sartre. There is only one Beckett situation and one Beckett strategy: a central character is made to cut genial-Irish capers in the philosophic badlands. The darker the badlands, the more fey the antics become. The strategy is mostly out of Laurence Sterne. It is fake because Beckett so hugely enjoys striking these antic postures and saying such whimsical things before so dark a back-drop. Here is Karl on Beckett's characters: "The quality of their hopelessness surpasses that of any other characters in literature, with Celine's Ferdinand Bardamu and Swift's Gulliver perhaps excepted." Notice that *perhaps*. It is supposed to suggest that Karl's mind is one of great range and exceedingly fine calibration. One in which all authors are ranked exactly as to the hopelessness of their characters, from Celine at one end to *perhaps* Horatio Alger at the other. *Perhaps* Beckett has outgone Swift and Celine. Karl is such a scholar, you see, and hence so careful, and the distinctions are so fine that he would not want to pronounce definitely. It is all sham. Swift's Gulliver is not hopeless at all: Swift was a very sturdy rationalist and Karl's notion of him is derived from one of the more lurid biographies, *perhaps* from *The Intelligent Lady's Guide to the Mad Dean of St. Patricks*.

Durrell gets high marks too, because he is such a brave experimenter. But Durrell's ideas are only debased Lawrence, and his experiments with time are an almost complete failure. Beside Joyce he is tame in this respect; beside Anthony Powell, he is pretentious. Karl does make one acute observation about the lack of will in Durrell's characters, but this is quoted from Lionel Trilling and comes "trailing clouds of glory," the sleek glory of Trilling's prose. When he only means that Durrell's characters have no will, Trilling must write of their "peculiar negative relation to the will."

Karl is also high on C. P. Snow whom he calls a major novelist and compares to the Greek dramatists. Karl is fond of comparing people to the Greek dramatists; he does it with Beckett, with Graham Greene, with Ivy Compton-Burnett too. It is a bizarre enough comparison in any of these cases, but in that of Snow obviously ridiculous. The gray, positivist world of Snow is hundreds of light years removed from that of the Greek drama. But instead of arguing about Snow, let us pass over him with an epigram, which is only to anticipate what history will do. The epigram is from Wyndham Lewis and is the best explanation yet of that pattern in recent literary history by which the scientist is erected into sage if he only spell creditably, the pattern which produced such earlier sages as Thomas Henry Huxley and H. G. Wells and has now given us Snow. Here is the comment of Lewis: "The sphinx-like silence at most times of the scientific man results in his sporadic utterances . . . having a peculiar impressiveness. When the specialist in Bright's disease speaks, it is as though you heard the kidneys speaking." This operates so strongly that the very baldness of Snow's prose begins to operate for him. We are likely to think that, the prose being as flat as it obviously is, there must be some immense, probably scientific, gravity about the ideas. It does not follow. They are only flat and positivist, like the prose. George Orwell's is a better prose and a better heart and a better mind. But Karl rules that Orwell is not major. Largely on the ground, it would seem, that his novels do not cover as many square miles of surface as those of Snow.

Greene and Waugh are given bad marks, which, at this point, will cause no surprise. What Karl has against them is their Christianity. In the case of Greene, he says, it makes tragedy impossible. In the case of Waugh, comedy. It takes him much longer than this to say it, but this is what he says. It is an extremely naïve argument, but since it is frequently heard (Steiner's *Death of Tragedy* is a recent example) some attention may be given to it. First of all, Karl argues that Greene does not write tragedy as the Greeks did. (Characteristically, Karl devotes several pages to demonstrating what anybody will readily grant, that Greene is not a fifth century Greek.) Therefore, he in effect argues, Greene does not write tragedy. Karl has defined tragedy to exclude Greene, then triumphantly announces that Greene is excluded. What novelist has ever written tragedy in Karl's sense of that term? A similar argument is used against Waugh. We are told that Waugh's ideas are socially outmoded, that he appears to be a Tory and is known to be a Catholic. Therefore, comedy is debarred to him. Here is part of Karl's argument: "In *Black Mischief* . . . Basil Seal is successful as Minister of Modernisation in Azania, a Negro Empire off the coast of Africa, simply because he treats the natives as savages, despite their aspirations for freedom and Western culture. Waugh accepts as true the nonsense he has heard about natives; and he can then lampoon all those who want to treat the natives as civilized." First of all, Waugh as a correspondent had seen these natives firsthand and did not need to be told about them. Secondly, Karl here implies people must be treated in fiction in the light of their own pretensions rather than as they are. This would indeed be the death of comedy: no Malvolio, no burgess gentleman, no Gulliver, no Mrs. Jellaby, to go no further. What Karl is saying is that the comedian must treat Africans as "underdeveloped peoples" or "emergent nations," that

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is, as they appear in his own patronizing and smelly little orthodoxy.

On the two lady novelists, Elizabeth Bowen and Ivy Compton-Burnett, Karl is just adequate. Here he confines himself largely to plot summaries and reportage, opining only that Elizabeth Bowen has written very poetically within a limited range and that Miss Compton-Burnett's is a grim but valid kind of comedy. Which is to play admirably safe, one would say.

But the critical itch comes back when he discusses Joyce Cary and Henry Green. Cary is treated patronizingly because his novels are not sufficiently experimental. Also because his ideas are *traditional*, that word being exclusively a pejorative with Karl. While it is true that Cary's comedy does not have the bite of Waugh's, this effect has little to do with the age of his ideas. It is produced rather by Cary's fondness for whimsy and an attendant drift to sentimentality. Karl concludes his remarks on Henry Green by saying that Green, "through some alchemical artistic process" has created a world of order. It is true that Karl's analysis leaves the process pretty mysterious, but after a chapter of high-flying exegesis and inflated prose he owes us a solider conclusion than this.

On the Angry Young Men, he is a shade better. He sensibly urges a new name for the group. *Angry Young Men* was inaccurate to begin with and has got very tiresome. The writers to whom it is applied are notoriously unhappy with it, but neither they nor Karl has come up with anything better. Karl sees the "Angries" as a shallow and provincial lot whose attacks on their time have often been merely petulant or boorish. He makes little attempt, however, to distinguish among individual "Angries," and it is unfair to go on lumping Amis, Wain, and Braine with writers (John Osborne) who are clearly inferior. Also, one is uneasy about parts of Karl's approach. He seems to suggest that any approach to the subject of class structure must approximate that of Theodore Dreiser or Michael Gold, class structure being too weighty a subject for comedy. Finally, one is annoyed to see Karl repeatedly chide the "Angries" for publishing too quickly since his own book has been put together in a haste wholly indecorous.

The composite chapters that follow are mostly unsatisfactory. They consist of little more than plot summaries and hurried critical notations, these latter often in the special language of the dust-jacket. Thus, we are told of Anthony Powell's *Music of Time*: ". . . the reader becomes increasingly aware of the music itself, of the frequent variations and modulations on a basic theme, of the counterpointing of motifs and characters, of the rich harmonic chords suggested by the author's close orchestration, of the subtle melodies that result from precise notation." It is all obvious sham. And we are told of Nigel Dennis on the basis of two uneven books that "He joins with the major satirists of the past, Voltaire among them, as a fearless castigator of social and political nonsense." Powell and Dennis are among the finest comic writers now operating in English, and they deserve more extended and intelligent treatment than this. But Karl's book is bent on getting there first, and they get the hack-rhapsodic treatment of the weekly review. In the last pages, names and titles come so fast and with so little discrimination (William Golding gets seven pages to one and a half for Christopher Isherwood) that all becomes a great blur. That great blur is only an adequate image of its author. His book is a very shoddy product.

—Warren Coffey

The Bergsonian Heritage, edited by Thomas Hanna; New York: Columbia University Press. 170 pp. $4.00.

In an address given at Bologna in 1911, Henri Bergson declared that the true philosopher says only one thing in his lifetime, because he enjoys but one point of contact with the real. Bergson himself was a living example of this maxim, for throughout his life he concentrated on a single theme: *reality is duration*. In his omnivorous appetite for knowledge he devoured not only mathematics, history, literature, and the fine arts, but the experimental and theoretical sciences as well. It was his central intuition into reality as unceasing and indivisible change which enabled him to effect a synthesis of the rigid logic of the scientist and the emotional depth of the poet and the mystic.

The evolution of Bergson's philosophy is but an ingenious and persistent application of this primary intuition to one area of reality after another. In the *Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (1889) Bergson focuses upon the problem of human freedom and asserts the identity of the individual with the grasp of his own inner duration. Freedom is the totalization of the individual. The free act is that decision which issues from the whole self which remains beyond the realm of physical necessity. In *Matter and Memory* (1896) Bergson applies his notion of duration to the process of knowledge which he described as the identity of image and object. This assertion destroyed the antinomy between realism and idealism.

Though his first two books brought him fame as a literary figure, it was *Creative Evolution* (1907) which made the name Bergson immortal. This work, a vitalistic interpretation of biological evolution, became one of the rarities of philosophic literature, a best seller. Here, Bergson describes life as a vital impulse, the *élan vital*, whose struggle against inert matter constitutes the evolutionary history of the species. In man the *élan vital* has conquered the inertia of matter and becomes turned inward in reflective consciousness. *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932) represents Bergson's lasting concern to effect a synthesis of the cultural

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legacy of the past and the emerging revolution in science. He now views evolution as taking place on the level of the individual rather than that of the species. The same vital impulse which liberated man's consciousness from the constrictions of matter has raised instinct to the level of intuition and culminated in the production of the religious hero, the mystic. In the light of this evolutionary ascent Bergson distinguishes static institutional religion from the dynamic religion of mysticism.

Today, contemporary philosophy accords to Bergson a place among its truly great. However, he remains alone among such giants as Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, and Hegel in the fact that he left no circle of disciples to promulgate his doctrines. There is no Bergsonian school, and not without reason. The transmission of a philosophical system presupposes a conceptual framework and a systematic theory of discourse. The very heart of Bergson's philosophy, an intuition of reality as duration which regards intelligence as a tool-making function and concepts as mental fictions, presents a grave problem to the communication of ideas.

The Bergsonian legacy is not a systematic account but an insight into and an attitude toward reality which must be lived rather than rationalized. Its influence upon our own times has been pervasive, though at the same time subtle and indirect. We could best categorize Bergson's philosophy, which describes rather than defines and implies rather than states, as a tantalizing one. Its attractiveness results from its elusiveness or ambiguity which refuses to reduce the real to the formulas of science or to the feelings of mysticism, but seeks to integrate the two.

The Bergsonian Heritage is an attempt to assess the influence of this legacy. In 1959, a group of scholars gathered in France and in America to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Henri Bergson. As a tribute to this man they presented the essays which comprise the volume. The roster of contributors is impressive: Edouard Morot-Sir, Jaroslav Pelikan, Enid Starkie, Gabriel Marcel, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean Wahl, and Vladimir Jankelevitch, among others. An anthology of this sort tends to skim the surface of its subject and, of necessity, suffers from a lack of continuity. However, this fresh look at the Bergsonian legacy, especially in five of the essays, make this volume well worth reading.

In "What Bergson Means to Us Today," Edouard Morot-Sir discusses the latter's contribution to European existentialism. He insists that the Bergsonian legacy is primarily a vision of the problems that confront man in the twentieth century, especially the problem of extra-scientific knowledge and the problem of life as a response to freedom.

In "Bergson and the Theologians," Jaroslav Pelikan explores the impact of the problem formulated by Bergson in his *The Two Sources* of the tension between institutional religion and the prophetic tradition. He points out how subtly Bergson has helped to provoke one of the major theological discussions of our times on a theme that has occupied some of the best minds in Neo-Orthodox Protestant and Roman Catholic circles.

In "Bergson and Literature," Enid Starkie analyzes the influence of Bergson on Péguy and Proust and on an entire generation of literary figures of the Symbolist movement. Bergson's philosophy, claims Starkie, resulted in a shift in the focus of personality from intelligence to intuition and feeling, and made the data consciousness the domain of the artist's probing.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in a provocative essay, declares that the Bergsonian heritage is a spirit of daring which remains dissatisfied with accepted opinions and unreflected answers. He maintains that Bergson lives on as a fountainhead for those in whom the spirit of discovery is alive.

Finally, in a memorable essay, "With the Whole Soul," Vladimir Jankelevitch presents Bergson as a holistic philosopher who saw reality in terms of utter totalities. His is a philosophy which demands total adherence of the heart and of the spirit. Jankelevitch sees the Bergsonian heritage in the form of a constant challenge to those who would engage in the philosophical endeavor to give of themselves without reserve, for while truth can be merely the object of contemplation, it is an object of fulfillment and a true sustenance.

To the impressive array of Bergsonian scholarship *The Bergsonian Heritage* constitutes a welcome addition, since, in somewhat the manner of the philosopher himself, it bypasses the systematic and presents the subtle impact of a magnificent insight. The book is of merit because it captures the heart of Bergson, not as a monument in the mausoleum of philosophy, but as a bold spirit of inquiry and a call to personal responsibility which challenges us to take part in the task of "fulfilling the essential function of the universe, which is a machine for the making of gods."

—Michael Carella

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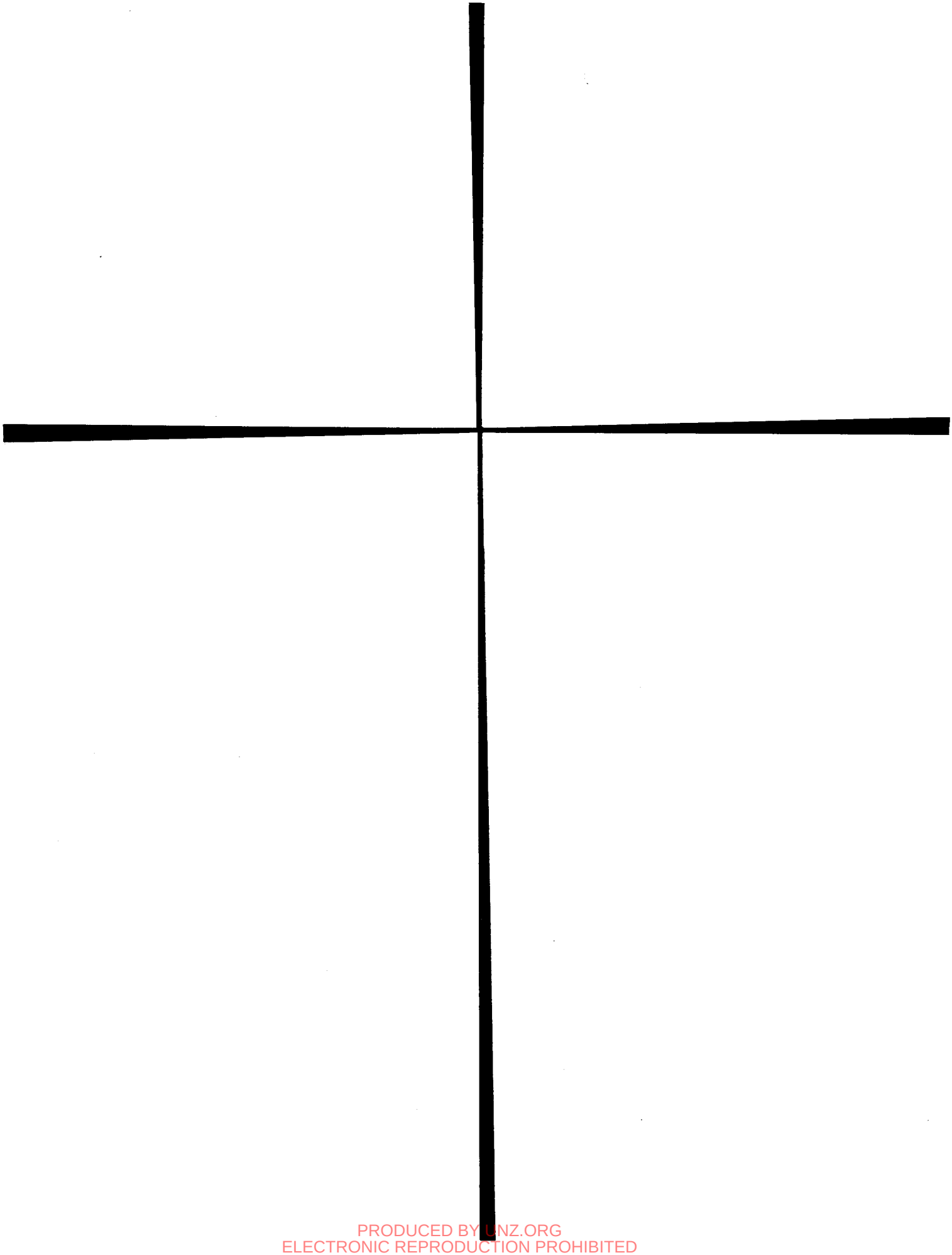

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